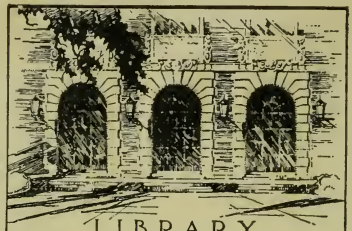

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CARITÀ

BY

MRS OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF

'THE CHRONICLES OF CARLINGFORD'

ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

SECOND EDITION

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CARITÀ.

CHAPTER I.

THE BERESFORDS.

James Beresford and Annie his wife had been married for more than a dozen years—their only child, indeed, had nearly attained the age of twelve at the time when this history begins. They had both got footing on that plateau of middle age which, if it comes to something like level ground at thirty, need not think of a descending step for twenty years—the time of the greatest enjoyments and most solid progress of life. He was at one end and she at the other of the first decade; the one approaching the forties, the other scarcely well out of the twenties; both ready to laugh at the advance of years, which was as yet but a joke to them,

and neither having thought of bidding any grave farewell to youth. She was impulsive, enthusiastic and nervous; he philosophical and speculative, a man ready to discuss any theory in earth or heaven, and without any prejudices such as might make one subject of discussion appear less legitimate than another. They were not very rich, but neither were they poor in any sense of the word. He had been called to the Bar, but had never gone any further in that career. They had enough between them to live on without show, but without pinching, as so many people of quietly social, semi-literary tastes do in London. They knew a number of people. They saw all the pictures, read all the books, and heard all the music that was going; not absorbed in any art, but with just enough devotion to all to make their life full and pleasant. And there could scarcely be a pleasanter life. The fantasies of youth, but not the sentiment of youth, had ended for both. Mr. Beresford had some mildly scientific pursuits, was a member of some learned societies, and of one or two new and advanced clubs where clever men were supposed to abound. Occasionally in his comfortable library he wrote

an article for a review or magazine, which was very much talked about by his friends, to the great edification and amusement of people who live by writing articles and say nothing about them. This gave him an agreeable sense of duty to add seriousness to his life; and he was never without occupation—meetings of committees, scraps of semi-public business, educational and other projects, which, for the moment at least, seemed full of interest to the world, made him feel himself a not unimportant, certainly not a useless, man. Mrs. Beresford, on her side, had the natural occupation of her housekeeping, and her child, whose education gave her much thought—so much thought that many people with full nurseries listened with a certain awe to her ideas of all that was necessary for her little girl, and sighed to think how much less was possible when there were six or seven little girls to think of.

The child, however, was not so over-educated and over-cared for as might have been fancied; for the parents were young, as has been said, very fond of each other, and fond of their own way; which likings did not consist with the burden of dragging a small child with them

wherever they went. The Beresfords liked to go about 'honeymooning,' as their friends called it, and as they themselves were not displeased to call it, by themselves, over the world. They would start sometimes quite suddenly, to the Riviera in the middle of winter, to escape London fogs and wintry chills; to Paris at Easter; to Scotland in the autumn; even to Norway sometimes, or such difficult places; and it stood to reason that they could not take the child with them when they started at a day's notice on these delightful journeys. For their journeys were delightful. They were well enough off not to require to count the cost; they went lightly, with little luggage and no servants, and they went everywhere together. But it would have been bad for the little girl; therefore she stayed at home, under the care of the best of nurses, who had been Mrs. Beresford's nurse before the child's; and the father and mother, like two lovers, roamed lightly about the world. But when they were at home, Mrs. Beresford talked a great deal about education, and had plans enough to have educated six princesses, let alone one little girl of undistinguished lineage. It was a very lucky thing for all

parties, their friends said, that they had but this one child. Had they been hampered by half-a-dozen, what could they have done? It would have changed their life completely. And one of their many felicities was, that whereas they were preserved from the old-maidishness of childless married persons by having a child, their freedom of action was preserved by the fact that they had but one.

And they were wonderfully free of other relations who might have hampered them. Mrs. Beresford had been an orphan from her childhood, brought up by her grandmother, who in the course of nature was dead too; and Mr. Beresford's only two relations were a wealthy aunt, Charity Beresford, who lived in a pretty house in the country, within driving distance of London, and with whom lived his elder sister, Cherry Beresford, named after her aunt, and living in considerable subjection to that energetic woman. Miss Beresford was the richest member of the family, and her nephew had expectations from her; and Charity was the favourite female name of this branch of the race. But the idea of calling her child Charity did not at all smile upon young Mrs. Beresford when her

baby was born. She was beguiled, however, by the unusual look of it, which charmed her, into calling the little girl by the more melodious name of Carità, contracted prettily into Cara in the drawing-room, and Carry in the nursery. Aunt Charity growled when she heard of this, but did not otherwise complain, and gentle Aunt Cherry declared herself unfeignedly glad that her little niece had thus escaped the worse consequences of a symbolical name. When the young couple went away pleasuring, little Cara very often would be sent to Sunninghill, to pass the quiet days there under the charge of the aunts; and so all responsibility was removed from the minds of the parents. They had a letter sent to them every day to assure them of their welfare, however far off they might go—an extravagance which Aunt Charity condemned loudly, but which Aunt Cherry was proud of, as showing the devotion of the parents to little Cara. The child herself was very happy at Sunninghill, and was a much more prominent person there than at home, where very often she was in the way, and interrupted conversation. For a father and mother who are very fond of each other, and have a great deal to

talk of, often, it must be allowed, are hampered by the presence of one curious child, with quick ears and an inconveniently good memory. In this particular the half-dozen would have been more easily managed than the one.

Thus the Beresfords led a very pleasant life. They had the prettiest house; naturally, travelling so much as they did, they had been able to 'pick up' a great many charming things. You could scarcely see their walls for pictures; some very good, one or two wonderful windfalls, and the rest pretty enough; nothing strikingly bad, or next to nothing. Where other people had ordinary china, they had genuine old faïence, and one or two plaques which Raphael himself might have seen perhaps—Urbino ware, with Messer Giorgio's name upon it. Not to speak of the Venice point which Mrs. Beresford wore, there were brackets in the drawing-room hung with scraps of old *point coupé* which many a lady would have been glad to trim her dress with; and, instead of common *portières*, they had two pieces of old tapestry from an Italian convent which devotees went down on their knees before. But I have not space to tell you how many pretty things they had. It was one

of the pleasures of their life whenever they saw anything that pleased them to bring it home for the decoration of that pretty drawing-room, or the library, which Mr. Beresford had filled with old vellum-bound volumes of curious editions, and pretty books in Russian leather which kept the room always fragrant. What was wanting to this pleasant, warm, full, delightful living? Nothing but continuance; and it had not struck either of them that there was any doubt of this for long, long years at least. What a long way off threescore years and ten look when you are not yet forty! and death looked further off still. Neither of them thought of dying. Why should they? For, to be sure, though we know very well that must happen to us some time, in our hearts we are incredulous, and do not believe that *we* ever can die. The Beresfords never dreamt of anything so frightful. They were well, they were happy, they were young; and as it had been, so it would be; and a world so bright they felt must mean to go on for ever.

When Cara was about ten, however, the mother began to feel less well than usual. There was nothing much the matter with her, it was

thought: want of 'tone,'—a little irritability of disposition—a nervous temperament. What she wanted was change of air and scene. And she got that, and got better, as was thought; but then became ill again. No, not ill—unwell, indisposed, *mal à son aise*, nothing more. There was nothing the matter with her really, the doctors thought. Her lungs and her heart, and all vital organs, were perfectly sound; but there was a little local irritation which, acting upon a nervous temperament—— The nervous temperament was perpetually kept in the front, and all sorts of evils imputed to its agency. At Sunninghill, it must be confessed, they did not believe in the illness at all.

'Fudge,' said Aunt Charity, who had always been strong, and had no faith in nerves, 'don't talk to me of your nervous temperaments. I know what it means. It means that Annie has fallen sick of always having her own way. She has everything she can desire, and she is ill of having nothing more to wish for. A case of Alexander over again in a London drawing-room—that's what it is, and nothing else, my word upon it; and I know my niece.'

'Yes, Mr. Maxwell; perhaps there is some

truth in what Aunt Charity says,' said Miss Cherry. 'I think you know I don't judge harshly——'

'That means that *I* judge harshly,' said Miss Charity, bursting in; 'thank you, my dear. Well, you may call me uncharitable if you please; but there's where it is; let James lose the half of his fortune, or all his china get broken, and she'd come round in no time—that's what ails Annie. But as she belongs to a very refined society, and has a silly husband, it's called nerves. Bless me, Cherry, I hope I knew what nerves were, and all about it, before you were born.'

'You could not know Annie before I was born,' said Miss Cherry, who was devoid of imagination. 'I hope you will give her your best attention, Mr. Maxwell. My brother James is a very fond husband, poor fellow! If anything happened to Annie, he would never get the better of it. As for marrying again, or anything of that sort——'

'Good heavens!' said the doctor; 'I hope there is no need to take such an idea into consideration. We must not go so fast.'

Miss Charity laughed. She was a great deal

older than her niece, but much more sensible. 'There's the seventh commandment to be thought of,' she said; for her remarks were sometimes more free than they ought to be, and put Miss Cherry to the blush: and this was all the worse because she immediately walked out into the garden through the open window and left the younger lady alone with the doctor, who was an old friend of the family, and contemporary of the second Charity Beresford. Very old friends they were; even it was supposed that in their youth there had been or might have been passages of sentiment between these two now sitting so calmly opposite each other. Mr. Maxwell, however, by this time was a widower, and not at all sentimental. He laughed, too, as Miss Beresford made her exit by the window. He was very well used to the family, and all its ways.

'*She* wears very well,' he said, reflectively. 'I don't think she has aged to speak of for these twenty years. When I used to be coming here in my early days, when I was beginning practice——'

'The rest of us have changed very much since then.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Maxwell, thinking most of

himself; 'but she not at all. I could think when I look at her that I was still, as I say, a young fellow beginning practice——'

Miss Cherry sighed—very softly, but still she did sigh: over forty, but still in the position and with many of the sentiments of a girl. People laugh at the combination, but it is a touching one on the whole. What ages of lingering monotonous life had passed over her since her present companion began his practice, since her Aunt Charity had begun to be an old woman! Dr. Maxwell had married, had lost his wife, had gone through perhaps sharper troubles than Miss Cherry had known. He was now middle-aged and stoutish and weather-beaten—weather-beaten in aspect and in soul—while she was slim and soft and maidenly still. The sigh was half for those uneventful years, and half for the undevelopment which she was conscious of—the unchangedness of herself, underneath the outer guise, which was changed; but this was not safe ground, nor could it be talked of. So she brushed away the sigh with a little cough, and added quickly:

'I know perhaps what nerves are better than my aunt does, and I know Annie better. Tell

me seriously, Mr. Maxwell, now we are alone. You don't apprehend anything serious? Should she go on travelling and running about as they do if there is really anything the matter? No one can be so much interested as I am. You would be quite frank with me?'

'It is the best thing for her,' said the doctor. 'You now—I should not say the same for you. You are a tranquil person and patient; but for her, the more she runs about the better. It distracts her and keeps her from thinking. If she worries, it's all over with a woman like that.'

'She has so little to worry about.'

'Just so; and the less one has to bear the less one is fit for; that is to say,' said the doctor, getting up and going to the window, 'the less some people are fit for. There's that old aunt of yours to prove me a fool. She has never had anything to bear, that I know of; and she is strong enough to bear anything. Sixty-eight, and just look at her. There's a physique for you—that is the kind of woman,' Mr. Maxwell said, with a little outburst of professional enthusiasm, 'that I admire—as straight as a rod still, and every faculty in good order. That a

woman like that should never have married is a loss to the world.'

Miss Cherry, who had gone to the window too, and stood by his side, looked out somewhat wistfully at her old aunt. Cherry was not like her, but took after the other side of the family, her own mother, who had died young, and had not possessed any physique to speak of. 'It is very sweet to-day in the garden,' she said, inconsequently, and stepped out into the world of flowers and sunshine. Sunninghill was an ideal house for two ladies, a place which people who were shut out from such delights considered quite enough for happiness. Indeed, Miss Cherry Beresford's friends in general resented deeply the little plaintive air she sometimes took upon her. 'What could she wish for more?' they said, indignantly; 'a place that was just too good to be wasted on two single women. There should be a family in it.' This was especially the sentiment of the rector's wife, who was a friend of Cherry's, and who felt it a personal slight to herself, who had a large family and many cares, when Cherry Beresford, with not a thing in the world to trouble her, presumed to look as if she was not quite happy.

The house stood upon a hill, fringed round with small but delightful woods. These woods were on a level with the highest turrets of the great beautiful royal Castle of St. George, which lay full within sight in the afternoon sunshine. So you may imagine what a view it was that was visible from the old smooth velvet lawn round the house, which formed the apex to these woods. The quiet plain all around lay basking in the light underneath, and the Castle upon its hill dominated, with a broad and placid grandeur, that majestic sweep of country, with all its lights and shadows. The royal flag flut tered on the breeze, the great tower rose grey and solid against the sky. Green branches framed in this picture on every side; the cuttings in the trees made a picture-gallery indeed of different views for different hours, according to the lights. 'What a lovely place it is!' Mr. Maxwell said, with sudden enthusiasm; 'I always forget how lovely it is till I come back.'

'Yes, it is beautiful,' said Cherry, who was used to it. 'If you are going to send them away, I suppose Cara may come to us for the summer?—that makes such a difference.' Cherry was very well used to the different lights.

She acknowledged the beauty of her home, and yet I can fancy circumstances under which she would have liked a little house in a street better. Man or woman either cannot live by beauty alone any more than by bread.

'Here's a pretty business,' said Miss Beresford, briskly; 'half of my roses, I believe, spoiled for this year; no second show this time. Jones is the greatest idiot; he pretends to know everything, and he knows nothing. Your *protégé*, Cherry, of course. All the incapables hang on by you.'

'I can't see any signs of deficiency,' said the doctor, looking round.

'Not at this moment; if there were, he should have his dismissal on the spot. If those two go off again, as you are always sending them off, tell James I insist on the child coming here. Ah! that's what your women of nervous temperament do—leave their children at home in a poky London square, while they go wandering over the world. Tell them I wish it,' said Miss Beresford, with a laugh; 'they never go against me.'

'They know how kind you always are.'

'They know I'm old and will have something

to leave behind me, that's the plain English of it—as if I was going to accept poor Cherry's subjection, poor soul, without rewarding her for it! It is she who will have everything when I'm gone. I've told them that, but still they think there's a chance that Cara might cut her old aunt out. I can see through them. I see through most people,' she added, with a laugh, looking at him full. How could she know the thought passing through his mind at the moment, which was the abrupt reflection, uncalled for perhaps, that for a professional man, who had made no extraordinary name in his profession, Cherry Beresford, though an old maiden, would make not such a bad wife? Could the old witch see through broadcloth, and the comfortable coating of middle-aged flesh and blood, straight into a man's heart? He grew red foolishly, as if that were possible, and stammered a little in his reply:

'I can believe everything that is clever of you as well as everything that is kind; though why you ladies should make such a point of having a little chit like that, who can only disturb your quiet in this paradise of a place——'

'Oh, how can you say so!' said Cherry.

'The child's voice and the child's face make all the difference—they are better than sunshine. They make the place beautiful. I would give it all, twenty times over, to have the child.'

'Whom her mother is very glad to leave behind her.'

'Hold your tongue, Cherry,' said the elder lady; 'you mild little old maids, you are always in a way about children. I never took up that line. A child in the abstract is a nuisance. Now, a man—there are advantages about a man. Sometimes he's a nuisance too, but sometimes he's a help. Believe them, and they'll tell you that marriage was always far from their thoughts, but that children are their delight. That's not my way of thinking. But I happen to like little Cara because she is Cara, not because she is a child. So she may come and take her chance with the rest.'

Cherry had turned away along the garden path, and was looking through one of the openings at one of the views. She knew it by heart—exactly how the light fell, and where were the shadows, and the name of every tower, and almost the shape of every cloud. Was it wonderful that this was not so delightful to her

as to the strangers who could not see that view every day in their lives? To some people, indeed, the atmospheric changes, the effects of wind and colour, the waverings and dispersions of those clouds, would have made poetry enough to fill up all that was wanting; but poor Miss Cherry was not poetical in this big way, though she was very fond of pretty verses, and even wrote some occasionally; but how she longed for the child's innocent looks—the child's ceaseless prattle! Her gentle delicacy was hurt at that unnecessary gibe about the old-maidishness, and her supposed sham rejection of the husband who had never come her way. 'Why should she talk of men—especially before *him*? What do I want with men?' said poor Miss Cherry to herself; 'but my own niece—my brother's child—surely I may wish for her.' And surely there could not have been a more innocent wish.

CHAPTER II.

A FRIGHT.

'WHICH you please; you are not gouty or rheumatical, or anything of that sort,' said Mr. Maxwell, almost gaily. 'Homburg, for instance —Homburg would do—or Baden, if you prefer that. I incline to the one you prefer; and enjoy yourself as much as you can—that is my prescription. Open air, novelty, change; and if you find you don't relish one place, go to another. The sea, if you take a fancy for the sea; and Sir William is of my opinion exactly. Choose the place which amuses you most.'

'It seems to me,' said Mr. Beresford, 'that these wise men are laughing at you, Annie. They know there's nothing the matter with you. If I were not much obliged to them for thinking so, I should say you had some reason to be offended. One knows what you doctors mean when you tell a patient to do whatever she likes best.'

'It means one of two things,' said Mrs. Beresford; 'either that it is nothing, or that it is hopeless——'

Her husband burst into a soft laugh. 'Well!' he said, 'it is very evident it cannot be the last—so it must be as I say. It is injurious to our pride, my darling; for I allow that it is pleasant to possess either in your own person or your wife's a delicate and mysterious malady, of which it can be said that it baffles the doctors, without very much hurting the patient; but never mind. If you can bear this disrespectful verdict that you have nothing the matter with you, I assure you it makes me quite happy.'

Mrs. Beresford looked at the doctor with very keen, eager eyes—eyes which had grown bigger and keener of late, perhaps from the failing of the round, smooth outlines of the face. She noticed that, though Maxwell saw very well that she was looking at him, he did not reply to those looks, but rather turned to her husband and answered him, as if he had not observed her at all.

'I don't mean to be at all disrespectful,' he said; 'there is a little disturbance of the system,

which might turn to something as serious as you could desire, and take away the comfort of life perhaps more completely than a regular disease; but I hope that is not likely to happen here.'

'No; I don't think it,' said the easy man. 'We shall try Baden, which is the prettiest—unless you prefer some other place; in short, we shall go off without guide or compass, and do exactly what pleases ourselves. We have done so, it must be allowed, pretty often before—but to do it with the sanction of the faculty——'

'And the child—as usual—will go to Sunninghill?'

'Why should you say as usual, Mr. Maxwell?' said Mrs. Beresford, with a suspicion of offence. 'Do you think I ought to take her with me? Do you suppose, perhaps, that I might not come back again—that I might never—see——'

'This is so unnecessary,' said the doctor, remonstrating. 'What must I say? I wish I was as certain of a thousand a year. You will come back quite well, I hope.'

'When people are very ill don't you say

much the same things to them? There was poor Susan Maitland, whom you banished to Italy to die. People talked of her coming back again. Oh, no! I am not thinking of myself, but of the subject in general. One needed only to look in her face to see that she would never come back.'

'People have different ideas of their duty,' said Maxwell. 'Some think it best not to frighten a patient with thoughts of death. I don't know that one can lay down any rule; one is guided by circumstances. To some nervous people it is best not to say anything Some are more frightened than others—just as some people are more susceptible to pain than others.'

'Now I am going to ask you another question,' said Mrs. Beresford. 'Suppose you had a patient very ill—I mean hopelessly ill, beyond all cure—do you think it is right to keep them alive as you do now, struggling to the last, staving off every new attack that might carry them off in quiet, fighting on and on to the last moment, and even prolonging that, when it comes so far, with cordials and stimulants? Keeping their breath in their poor, suf-

fering bodies till you get to the end of your resources—your dreadful, cruel resources, that is what I call them. Do you think this is right? I had an aunt who died dreadfully—of cancer——'

'Ah! An aunt? You did not tell me this,' said the doctor, off his guard; then, recovering himself, with something that looked like alarm, he said, hurriedly: 'What would you have us do—kill the poor creatures? neglect them? refuse what aid, what alleviations we can——'

'I'll tell you what I should like you to do if it were me,' she said, eagerly. 'When it was all over, when you were sure I could not get better, when there was nothing more in life but to suffer—suffer: then I should like you to make a strong, sweet dose for me to put me out of my trouble. I should like James to give it me. Do you remember what was said that time in India, in the mutiny? I don't know if it was true, but people said it. That the husbands of some of the poor ladies kissed them and shot them, to save them; don't you remember? That is what I should like you to do—a sweet, strong dose; and James would

bring it to me and kiss me, and put it to my lips. That would be true love!' she said, growing excited, the pale roses in her cheeks becoming hectic red; 'that would be true friendship, Mr. Maxwell! Then I should not feel afraid. I should feel that you two stood between me and anguish, between me and agony——'

Both the men rose to their feet as if to restrain her vehemence, with one impulse. 'My darling, my darling!' said James Beresford, in dismay, 'what are you thinking of?' As for Mr. Maxwell, he walked to the window and looked out, his features working painfully. There was a moment in which the husband and wife clung together, he consoling her with every reassuring word that he could think of, she clinging to him with long, hysterical sobs. 'My love, what has put this into your head?' he said, half sobbing too, yet pretending to laugh. 'My Annie, what fancy is this? Have you lost your wits, my darling? Why, this is all folly; it is a dream; it is a craze you have taken into your head. Here is Maxwell will tell you——'

But Maxwell made him a sign over his

wife's head so impassioned and imperative that the man was struck dumb for the moment. He gazed blankly at the doctor, then stooped down to murmur fond words less distinct and articulate in her ear. Fortunately, she was too much excited, too much disturbed, to notice this sudden pause, or that the doctor said nothing in response to her husband's appeal. She held fast by his arm and sobbed, but gradually grew calmer, soothed by his tenderness, and after a while made a half-smiling, tearful apology for her weakness. It was after dinner on a lovely summer evening, not more than twilight, though it was late. The two gentlemen had been lingering over their claret, while she lay on the sofa waiting for them, for she did not choose to be shut up upstairs all by herself, she said. After she had recovered they went to the drawing-room, where the windows were all open, and a couple of softly-burning lamps lit up the twilight with two half-veiled moons of light. There was not a lovely prospect as at Sunninghill; nothing, indeed, but the London square, where a few trees vegetated, just room enough for the dews to fall, and for 'the little span of sky and little lot of

stars' to unfold themselves. But even London air grows soft with that musical effect of summer, and the sounds of passing voices and footsteps broke in with a faint, far-off sound as in dreams: the country itself could not have been more peaceful. Mrs. Beresford, half ashamed of herself, sat down at the little, bright tea-table, just within the circle of one of the lamps, and made tea, talking with a little attempt at gaiety, in which, indeed, the natural revulsion of relief after that outbreak of alarm and melancholy was evident. It was she now who was the soul of the little party; for the doctor was moody and preoccupied, and her husband watched her with an anxiety almost too great to be kept within the bounds of ordinary calm. She rose, however, to the occasion. She began to talk of their probable travels, of Baden and Homburg, and all the other places which had been suggested to her. 'We shall be as well known about the world as the Wandering Jew,' she said; 'better, for he had not a wife; and now that we have nearly exhausted Europe, there will be nothing for us but the East or Egypt—suppose we go to Egypt; that would be original?'

'Not at all original,' said Mr. Maxwell, who seemed half to resent her new-born gaiety. 'All the cockneys in the world go to Egypt. Mr. Cook does the Pyramids regularly; and as for Jerusalem, it is common, common as Margate, and the society not much unlike.'

'Margate is very bracing, I have always heard,' said Mrs. Beresford, 'and much cheaper than a German bath. What do you say to saving money, James, and eating shrimps and riding donkeys? I remember being at Margate when I was a child. They say there is no such air anywhere; and Mr. Maxwell says that the sea, if I like the sea——'

'As for bracing air, my love, I think there is nothing like St. Moritz. Do you remember how it set me up after that—that——'

'Give him a big, well-sounding name, doctor,' said Mrs. Beresford, laughing; 'it was only a bilious attack. But talking of the sea, there is Biarritz—that would do, don't you think? It is warm, and it *was* gay. After all, however, I don't think I care for the sea. The Italian lakes are fine in the autumn, and as it gets cooler we might get on perhaps to Florence, or even Rome—or Kamtschatka, or Timbuctoo,

or the Great Sahara,' she said, with a burst of laughter. 'You are complaisance itself, you gentlemen. Now I'll go and sing you something to reward you for humouring me to the top of my bent, and licensing me to go where I please.'

She had a pretty voice and sang well. The piano was at the other end of the room, the 'back drawing-room' of the commonplace London house. The two men kept their places while she went away into the dim evening, and sat down there scarcely visible, and sang. The soft, sweet voice, not powerful, but penetrating, rose like a bird in the soft gloom. James Beresford looked at the doctor with an entreating look of secret anguish as the first notes rose into the air, so liquid, so tender, so sweet.

'Are you afraid? tell me!' he said, with pathetic brevity.

Maxwell could not bear this questioning. He started up, and went to look this time at a picture on the wall. 'I don't know that I have any occasion to be afraid,' he said, standing with his back turned to his questioner, and quite invisible from the piano. 'I'm—a nervous man for a doctor when I'm interested in a case——'

Here there was a pause, for she had ended the first verse of the song, and the low warble of the symphony was not enough to cover their voices.

'Don't speak of her as a case,' said Beresford, low but eager, as the singing recommenced: 'you chill my very blood.'

'I didn't mean to,' said the doctor, with colloquial homeliness; and he went away into the back drawing-room and sat down near the piano, to escape being questioned, poor Beresford thought, who sat still mournfully in the narrow circle of the lamplight, asking himself whether there was really anything to fear. The soft security of the house with all its open windows, the friendly voices heard outside, the subdued pleasant light, the sweet voice singing in the dimness, what a picture of safety and tranquillity it made! What should happen to disturb it? Why should it not go on for ever? James Beresford's sober head grew giddy as he asked himself this question, a sudden new ache undreamed of before leaping up, in spite of him, into his heart. The doctor pretended to be absorbed in the song; he beat time with his fingers as the measure went on. Never in the

memory of man had he shown so much interest in singing before. Was it to conceal something else, something which could not be put into words, against the peace of this happy house, which had come into his heart?

Fortunately, however, Beresford thought, his wife forgot all about that agitating scene for some days. She did not speak of it again; and for about a week after was unusually lively and gay, stronger and better than she had been for some time, and more light in heart, talking of their journey, and making preparations for it with all the pleasant little sentiment which their 'honeymooning' expeditions had always roused in her. When everything was ready, however, the evening before they left home a change again came over her. Cara had been sent to Sunninghill with her nurse that day, and the child had been unwilling to go, and had clung to her mother with unusual pertinacity. Even when this is inconvenient it is always flattering: and perhaps Mrs. Beresford was pleased with the slight annoyance and embarrassment which it caused.

'Remember, James,' she said, with some vivacity, as they sat together that evening, 'this

is to be the last time we go honeymooning. Next time we are to be respectable old married people (as we are, with our almost grown-up daughter). She is nearly as tall as I am, the child! nearly eleven—and so very tall for her age.'

'I think we might take her,' said Beresford, who indeed had often wished for her before. 'She is old enough to bear the travelling, and otherwise it would do her good.'

'Yes; this must be the last time,' she said, her voice suddenly dropping into a sigh, and her mood changing as rapidly. A house is dreary on the eve of departure. Boxes in the hall, pinafores on the furniture, the pretty china, the most valuable nicknacks all carried away and locked up—even the habitual books disturbed from their places, the last *Pall Mall* on the table. The cloud came over her face as shadows flit over the hills, coming down even while she was speaking. 'The last time!' she said. 'I can't help shivering. Has it grown cold? or is it that some one is walking over my grave, as people say?'

'Why, Annie, I never knew you were superstitious.'

'No. It is a new thing for me; but that is scarcely superstition. And why should I care who walked over my grave? I must die some time or other and be buried, unless they have taken to burning before then. But there is one thing I feel a great deal about,' she added, suddenly. 'I said it once before, and you were frightened, James. If you knew that I was going to die of a painful disease—*must* die—that nothing could happen to save me, that there was nothing before me but hopeless pain—James, dear, listen to me!—don't you think you would have the courage for my sake to make an end of me, to put me out of my trouble?'

'Annie, for Heaven's sake don't talk so. It is nonsense, but it makes me unhappy.'

'As a matter of speculation,' she said; with a knowledge of his weakness, 'you can't think it would be wrong to do it—do you, James?'

'As a matter of speculation,' he said, and the natural man awoke in him. He forgot the pain the idea had caused him, and thought of it only as an idea; to put it in other words, the woman beguiled him, and he got upon one of his hobbies. 'There are many things one allows as speculation which one is not fond of in fact.

People must have a certain power over their own lives, and I think with you, my love, that it is no charity to keep infirm and suffering people just alive, and compel them to drag their existence on from day to day. Notwithstanding Heaven's canon 'gainst self-slaughter, I think people should be allowed a certain choice. I am not altogether against euthanasia; and if indeed recovery is hopeless and life only pain——'

'Yes, James,' she said, eagerly, her eyes lighting up, her cheeks flaming with the red of excitement; 'I am glad you see it like that; one might go further perhaps—when from any reason life was a burden; when one was useless, hopeless, unhappy——'

'Stop a little; we are going too fast,' he said, with a smile, so entirely did the argument beguile him. 'No one is justified in treating unhappiness like a mortal disease; unhappiness may pass away—does pass away, we all know, even when it seems worst. I cannot allow that; neither would I let people judge which lives were useless, their own or other people's; but illness which was beyond the possibility of cure might be different; therefore, if the patient

wished it, his wish, I think, should be law—— Annie, my darling! what is this? what do you mean?'

She had suddenly risen from where she was sitting near him, and thrown herself half at his feet, half into his arms.

'Only this,' she said; 'promise me—promise me, James! if this should ever happen to me—if you had the assurance, not only from me, but from—the people who know—that I had a terrible complaint, that I could never get better; promise that you would put me out of my pain, James. Promise that you would give me something to deliver me. You would not stand by and see me going down, down into the valley of death, into misery and weariness and constant pain, and, O God! loathsomeness, James!'

She buried her head in his breast, clinging to him with a grasp which was almost fierce; her very fingers which held him, appealing strenuously, forcing a consent from him. What could he say? He was too much distressed and horrified to know how to shape his answer. Fond words, caresses, soothings of every kind were all in vain for use at such a moment. 'Far be it from you, my darling; far be it from you,'

he cried. 'You! oh, how can you let your imagination cheat you so, my love! Nothing like this is going to happen, my Annie, my best, my dearest——'

'Ah!' she cried; 'but if it were not imagination!—promise me, James.'

Whether she did eventually wring this wild promise from him he never knew. He would have said anything to calm her, and finally he succeeded; and having once more cleared her bosom of this perilous stuff, she regained her gaiety, her courage and spirits, and they set off as cheerful as any pair of honeymoon travellers need wish to be. But after she had left him and gone to her room pacified and comforted that night, you may fancy what sort of a half-hour that poor man had as he closed the windows, which had still been left open, and put out the lamps, as was his practice, for they were considerate people and did not keep their servants out of bed. He stepped out on the balcony and looked up at the moon, which was shedding her stream of silver light as impartially upon the London housetops as if those white roofs had been forest trees. How still it seemed, every one asleep or going to rest, for it was late

—a few lights glimmering in high windows, a sensation of soft repose in the very air! God help this silent, sleeping earth, upon which, even in her sleep, dark evils were creeping! Was some one perhaps dying somewhere even at that serene moment, in the sweet and tranquil stillness? His heart contracted with a great pang. In the midst of life we are in death. Why had those haunting, terrible words come into his ears?

CHAPTER III.

HONEYMOONING.

THE real honeymoon is not always a delightful moment. This, which sounds like heresy to the romantic, and blasphemy to the young, is a fact which a great many people acknowledge readily enough when they have got beyond the stage at which it sounds like an offence to the wife or to the husband who is supposed to have made that period rapturous. The new pair have not the easy acquaintance with each other which makes the happiness of close companionship; perhaps they have not that sympathy with each other's tastes which is almost a better practical tie than simple love. They are half afraid of each other; they are making discoveries every day of new points in each other's characters, delightful or undelightful as may be, which bewilder their first confidence of union; and the more mind and feeling there is between

them, the more likely is this to be the case. The shallow and superficial 'get on' better than those who have a great deal of excellence or tender depth of sentiment to be found out. But after the pair have come to full acquaintance; after they have learned each other from A B C up to the most difficult chapter; after the intercourse of ordinary life has borne its fruit; there is nothing in the world so delightful as the honeymooning which has passed by many years the legitimate period of the honeymoon. Sometimes one sees respectable fathers and mothers enjoying it, who have sent off their children to the orthodox honeymoon, and only then feel with a surprised pleasure how sweet it is to have their own solitude *à deux*; to be left to themselves for a serene and happy moment; to feel themselves dearer and nearer than they ever were before. There is something infinitely touching and tender in this honeymooning of the old. James Beresford and his wife, however, were not of these. They were still young, and of all the pleasures they had there was none equal to this close and unbroken companionship. They knew each other so well, and all their mutual tastes, that they scarcely required

to put their intercourse into words; and yet how they would talk!—about everything, about nothing, as if they had just met after a long absence, and had thoughts to exchange on every subject. This is a paradox; but we are not bound to explain paradoxes which are of the very essence of life, and the most attractive things in it. It had been the habit of these two to go everywhere together. Mrs. Beresford had not the prejudices of an English female Philistine. She went where her husband wanted to go, fearing nothing, and trotted about with him high and low, through picture-galleries and old churches, to studios, even behind the scenes of the operas, and through the smoke-clouds of big ateliers. Nothing came amiss to her with him by her side. It is almost the only way in which a woman can enjoy the freedom of movement, the easy locomotion of a man. Mrs. Beresford went away quite cheerfully, as we have said. She forgot or put away her mysterious terrors. She addressed herself to all the ordinary enjoyments which she knew so well. 'We shall never be so free again,' she said, half laughing, half with a remote infinitesimal pang. 'We shall have to go to the cor-

rect places and do the right things when Cara is with us.' 'We must give up bric-a-brac,' she said afterwards. 'Cara must not grow up acquainted with all those dusty back premises; her pretty frocks would be spoiled, and her infantine sincerity. If she had heard you bargaining, James, for that Buen Retiro cup! Saying it is naught, it is naught, and then bragging of the treasure you had found as soon as it was out of the dealer's hands.'

'Well,' he said, with a shrug of his shoulders; 'I only do as other people do. Principles of honour don't consist with collecting. I am no worse than my neighbours.'

'But that will never do for Cara,' said the mother; 'if you and I are not all her fancy painted us, we will not do for Cara. No, I thought you had never remarked her really. She is the most uncompromising little idealist! and if we disappoint her, James, I don't know what the child will do.'

'It appears to me that you are making a bugbear of Cara.'

'No; but I know her. We must give up the bric-a-brac; for if you continue with it under her blue eyes you will be ruined. If

she was here she would make you go back and tell the man he has sold you that cup too cheap.'

'That would be nonsense,' said Mr. Beresford, involuntarily putting his hand into the pocket where he kept his money. 'Folly! You don't suppose he gave half as much for it as he sold it to us for. The very mention of that sort of sickening conscientiousness puts one out. We are to sell in the dearest and buy in the cheapest market, eh? That's the true principle of trade.'

'It is not in the Bible, though,' said Mrs. Beresford, with a smile. 'Cara would open her eyes and wonder; and you, who are the weakest of men, could never stand against her if Cara made big eyes.'

'The weakest of men! You flatter me, it must be allowed——'

'Yes; so you are, James. You could not endure to be disapproved of. What would have become of you if I, instead of giving in to all your ways, had been a more correct and proper person? If I had made you visit just the right things—go to English parties, and keep to the proper sort of tourist society? If

you had been obliged to sit indoors in the evenings and read a *Galignani* or a Tauchnitz novel while I worked, what would have become of you? I know well enough, for my part.'

'I should have done it, I suppose,' he said, half laughing; 'and will Cara—little Cara—be like that? You frighten me, Annie; we had better make away with her somehow; marry her, or hand her over to the aunts, before it comes to this.'

Then a sudden change came over the smiling face. 'Cara—or some one else—will most likely be like that. Poor James! I foresee trouble for you. How you will think of me when you are in bonds! when you want to go out and roam about on the Boulevards, and have to sit still instead and read aloud to somebody! Ah, how you will think of me! You will say, Poor Annie! if Annie had but lived——'

'What is this? what is this?' he said. 'Again, Annie! I think you want to make me miserable; to take all the comfort out of my life.'

'Oh, no, no; not that,' she said. 'I am only going to get my bonnet, and then we shall go out. Cara is not here yet to keep us in

order. We can honeymoon yet for one more year.'

Was this only the caprice of her nature (she had always been capricious) going a little further than usual? Her husband liked her all the better for her quick changes of sentiment; the laughing and crying that were like an April sky. He said to himself that she had always been like that; always changing in a moment, quarrelling sometimes even, making him uncomfortable for mere variety. Monotony was the thing she hated; and now she had taken this fad, this fancy, and thought herself ill. How could she be ill when she still could run about with him and enjoy herself as much as ever? How keen she had been in the bric-a-brac shop of which she had chosen to talk! He never should have found out that Buen Retiro cup but for her. It was her sharp eyes that saw it. It was she who had rummaged through the dust and all the commonplace gatherings to those things which had really interest. Ill! though all the College of Physicians swore it, and she to boot, he would not believe that she was ill. Disturbance of the system—that was all the worst of them ever said; but how little mean-

ing there was in that! Out of sorts! reduced to plain English, that was what disturbance of the system meant; and everybody was subject to as much. She came in, while he was in the full course of these thoughts, with a brilliant little flush on her cheeks, her eyes shining, her whole aspect full of animation. 'I am ready, Sir,' she said, making him a mocking curtsey. Yes; capricious, that was what she had always been, and he loved her for it. It explained her changes, her fancies, her strange notions better than anything else could do.

That was the first day, however, on which her strength really showed symptoms of breaking down. She got tired, which was a thing she never owned to; lost the pretty flush on her cheek, became pale, and worn out. 'I don't know what is the matter with me,' she said; 'all at once I feel so tired.'

'And with very good reason,' said he. 'Think how rapidly we have been travelling; think what we have been doing since. Why, you were on foot the whole morning. You are tired; so am I, for that matter. I was thinking of saying so, but you are always so hard upon my little fatigues. What a comfort for me to

find that you, too, for once in a way, can give in!' Thus he tried to take her favourite part and laugh her out of her terrors. She consented with a smile more serious than her gravity had been of old, and they went back to their room and dined 'quietly;' and he sat and read to her, according to the picture of English domesticity which she had drawn out with smiles a few hours before. It was so soon after that tirade of hers that they could not but remember it, both of them. As it happened, there was nothing but a Tauchnitz novel to read (and who that has been ill or sad, or who has had illness or sadness to solace in a foreign place, but has blessed the novels of Tauchnitz?), and he read it, scarcely knowing what the words were which fluttered before his eyes. And as for her, she did not take much notice of the story either, but lay on the sofa, and listened, partly to his voice, partly to the distant sound of the band playing, with strange heaviness and aching in her heart. It was not that she wished to be out listening to the band, moving about in the warm air, hearing the babble of society—that was not what she cared for; but to be lying there out of the current; to have dropped aside

out of the stream; to be unable for the common strain of life! So he read, sadly thinking, not knowing what he read; and she half listened, not knowing what she was listening to. It was the first time, and the first time is the worst, though the best. 'It is only once in a way,' he said to her, when the long evening was over; 'to-morrow you will be as well as ever.' And so she was. It was the most natural thing in the world that both or either of them should be tired, once in a way.

The Beresfords stayed for a long time on the Continent that year. They went about to a great many places. They stayed at Baden till they were tired of the place. They went to Dresden, because Mrs. Beresford took a fancy to see the great San Sisto picture again. Then they went on to lovely old-world Prague, and to lively Vienna, and through the Tyrol to Milan, and then back again to the Italian lakes. Wherever they went they found people whom it was pleasant to know, whom they had met before on their many journeys—people of all countries and every tongue—noble people, beautiful people, clever people—the sort of society which can only be had by taking a great

deal of trouble about it, and which, even with the greatest amount of trouble, many people miss entirely. This society included ambassadors and hill-farmers, poor curés, bishops, great statesmen, and professors who were passing rich on five shillings a day: nothing was too great or too small for them; and as wherever they went they had been before, so wherever they went they found friends. Sometimes it was only a chambermaid; but, nevertheless, there she was with a pleasant human smile. And, to tell the truth, James Beresford began to be very glad of the friendly chambermaids, and to calculate more where they were to be found than upon any other kind of society; for his wife had followed her usual practice of coming without a maid, and, as her strength flagged often, he was thankful, too thankful, to have some one who would be tender of her, and care for her as he himself was not always permitted to do, and as nobody else but a woman could. Oh, how he longed to get home, while he wandered about from one beautiful spot to another, hating the fine scenery, loathing and sickening at everything he had loved! Commonplace London and the Square with its comforts would have pleased him a hundred times better than lovely

Como or the wild glory of the mountains; but she would not hear of going home. One day, when the solemn English of a favourite Kammer Mädchen had roused him to the intolerable nature of the situation, he had tried, indeed, with all his might to move her to return. 'Your goot laty,' Gretchen had said, 'is nod—well. I ton't untershtand your goot laty. She would be bedder, mooch bedder at 'ome, in Lonton.' 'I think you are right, Gretchen,' he had said, and very humbly went in to try what he could do. 'My love,' he said, 'I am beginning to get tired of the Tyrol. I should like to get home. The Societies are beginning. I see Huxley's lectures start next week. I like to be there, you know, when all my friends are there Shouldn't you be pleased to get home?'

'No,' she said. She had been lying on the sofa, but got up as soon as he came in. 'You know I hate autumn in London; the fogs kill me. I can't—I can't go back to the fogs. Go yourself, James, if you please, and attend all your dear Societies, and hear Mr. Huxley. Take me to Como first, and get me rooms that look on the lake, and hire Abbondio's boat for me; and then you can go.'

'It is likely that I should go,' he said, 'without you, my darling! When did I ever leave you? But there are so many comforts at home you can't have here; and advice—I want advice. You don't get better so fast as I hoped.'

She looked at him with a strange smile. 'No; I don't get better, do I?' she said. 'Those doctors tell such lies; but I don't get worse, James; you must allow I don't get worse. I am not so strong as I thought I was; I can't go running about everywhere as I used to do. I am getting old, you know. After thirty I believe there is always a difference.'

'What nonsense, Annie! there is no difference in you. You don't get back your strength——'

'That's it; that's all. If you were to leave me quite alone and quiet, to recruit now; yes, I think I should like to know that you were in London enjoying yourself. Why shouldn't you enjoy yourself? Women get worn out sooner than men; and I don't want to cripple you, James. No; take me to Como—I have taken a fancy to Como—and then you can come back for me whenever you please.'

'I am not going to leave you,' he said, with a sigh. 'You must not be unreasonable, my darling. What pleasure would it be to me to go home without you? It was you I was thinking of; for me it is all right. I am quite happy here. As for Huxley and the rest, you don't think I care for them. It was you I was thinking of.'

'You said the Societies. Whatever you do, James, speak the truth. I suppose,' she added, with a laugh which sounded harsh, 'you are afraid I shall get very ill—die, perhaps, away from home?'

Poor man! what was he to say? 'Oh, Annie!' he cried, 'how you stab me! If I thought anything of the kind, you know I'd have Sir William here to-morrow, or any one, if it should cost me all I have. I know very well there is no danger,' he went on, taking a certain forlorn comfort out of his own bold words; 'but you don't get up your strength as you ought, and knocking about in these bare rooms can't be good for you; and, living as we are—and you have no maid——'

'I hate a maid. I like Gretchen a great deal better. She makes so much of me.'

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'Then take Gretchen with you, my dearest; take her to Como; keep her with you till you get home.'

'Oh, how like a man that is!' she said, laughing. 'Take Gretchen with me—Gretchen, who is her father's only daughter, the life and soul of the place! What would he do without Gretchen? He would have to shut up altogether. I might drop out of the world, and I would not be missed half so much as she would be. Do you know I begin to get tired of this place, and the hills, James,' she cried, starting up. 'Let us go and ask about Donato and his horses. I want to get to Como before October. Why, we'll come in for the vintage! I like the vintage; and there are advertisements everywhere about a sale at one of the villas. We shall be sure to pick up something. Is it too late to start to-day?'

'My darling, when you take a thing into your head——'

'Yes, to be sure, I like to do it all at once. I was always hot-headed. Now mind, we are to start to-morrow. I always loved Como, James; you know I always did. We went there the first year we were married. I don't

call it honeymooning when we don't go to Como; and remember this is our last bout of honeymooning; we shall have Cara next year.'

She laughed, and was very gay all the evening, delighted with the idea of the change. But when he put her into Donato's big old-fashioned *vettura* next morning, and saw everything fastened on, and prepared for the long, slow journey, poor Beresford was very sad. He thought, if he could only have a long talk with Maxwell, and hear what Sir William had got to say, and know what it was that he had to fear, he should be less unhappy. There must be something, or she would not be so strange; but what was it? Almost anything was better, he thought, than fighting in the dark—fighting with ghosts, not knowing what you were afraid of. She was quite light-hearted at first, interested with the drive, and waved her hands to the hills as they went slowly out of sight. 'Good-bye,' she said, 'you dear old giants! I hope those white furs of yours will keep you warm till we bring Cara. What will Cara think of the mountains? She never saw anything bigger than Sunninghill.'

'Sunninghill has the effect of being much

higher than it is with that great level stretch of flat country. It impresses the imagination just as much as your giants. Don't laugh, Annie; but your mountains stifle me. I never have air enough to breathe. I like miles and miles of country round me. You know my weakness.'

'Sunninghill before the Alps!' she cried, laughing. ''Tis clear you are a true cockney. Give me your shoulder for a pillow, I think I shall go to sleep.'

And so she did; and the horses jogged on and on, now slow, now fast, their bells jingling, and Donato's whip making harmless circles and slashes over their heads; and houses and hedgerows, and slopes of mountain, flew past in a dream. James Beresford could see nothing but the wan lines of the face that rested on his shoulder, solemn in that deep sleep of weariness. How worn she was! how pale! growing whiter, he thought, and whiter, till sometimes in terror he stooped down close to make sure that the pale lips were parted by living breath.

CHAPTER IV.

THE THREE CHARITIES.

To live at Sunninghill, with one's feet on a level with the highest pinnacle of the big Castle at St. George's, what a thing it was in summer! All that country is eloquent with trees—big beeches, big oaks, straight elms, sweet birch-trees; even the very holly-bushes, in their dark green, grow tall into prickly straggling monsters, as big as the elms. But the triumph of the place perhaps is in spring, when the primroses come too thick for counting, and the woods are full of their fairy, indefinable fragrance. In the ripe summer there was no such lovely suggestion about; all was at that perfection which suggests only decay. The wild flowers were foxgloves, with here and there in the marshy places a lingering plume of meadow-sweet. The ferns had grown too strong and tall, like little trees. The woods were in their

darkest, fullest garments of green ; not another leaflet to come anywhere ; all full, and mature, and complete. Wild honeysuckle waved flags of yellow and brown from the high branches of big trees, which it had caught and tangled in ; and made the hedge into one big wall of flowers—almost too much when the sun was on it. In the very heart of August it was as cool in these shadowy wood-walks as in a Gothic chapel, and here and there on a little plateau of brown earth a bench underneath a tree offered rest and a view to the wayfarer. Mrs. Burchell was sitting on one of these, panting a little, on the special day we have to record. She was that rector's wife already mentioned, who was a contemporary of Cherry Beresford, and who grudged so much that 'two single women' should have all the delights of Sunninghill. She was just Miss Cherry's age, fat and fair, but more than forty, and she had seven children, and felt herself inconceivably in advance of Cherry, for whom she retained her old friendship however, modified by a little envy and a good deal of contempt. Cherry was an old maid ; that of itself surely was quite enough

to warrant the contempt and the envy. You had but to look at Mr. Burchell's rectory, which lay at the foot of the hill under the shadow of the woods, but facing towards the high road, which was very dusty, and exposed without a tree to the blaze of the west, and to compare it with the beautiful house on the top of the hill, sheltered so carefully, not too much nor too little—set in velvet lawns and dewy gardens, dust and noise kept at arm's length—to see the difference between them. It was a difference which Mrs. Burchell for her part could not learn not to resent; though, indeed, but for the benefice bestowed by Miss Beresford, the Burchells must have had a much worse lot, or indeed perhaps never would have united their lots at all. The rector's wife might have been as poor a creature as Miss Cherry, an old maid, and none of the seven Burchells might ever have come into being, but for the gift of that dusty Rectory from the ladies on the hill; but the rectorinn did not think of that. She was seated on the bench under the big oak, fanning herself with her handkerchief, while Agnes, her eldest daughter, and Dolly, her youngest, duti-

fully waited for her. They were going up to 'The Hill' for tea, which was a weekly ceremonial at least.

'At all events, mamma, you must allow,' said Agnes, 'that it is better to live at the foot of the hill than at the top. You never could take any walks if you had this long pull up every time you went out.'

'They don't have any long pull,' said her mother; 'they have their carriage. Ah, yes, they are very different from a poor clergyman's wife, who has done her duty all her life without much reward for it. It is not those who deserve them most, or who have most need of them, who get the good things of this life, my dear. I don't want to judge my neighbours; but Miss Charity Beresford I have heard all my life was not so very much better than a heathen. It may not go so far as that—but I have seen her, with my own eyes, laugh at your papa's best sermons. I am afraid she is not far removed from the wicked that flourish like a green bay tree; yet look at her lot in life and your papa's—a gentleman, too, and a clergyman with so many opportunities of doing good—and she in this fine place, a mere old woman!'

'If papa lived here should we all live here?' said Dolly, whose small brain was confused by this suggestion; 'then I should have the pony instead of Cara, and Miss Cherry would be my auntie! Oh, I wish papa lived here!'

'Hold your tongue,' said her mother. 'Cherry Beresford is a ridiculous old creature. Dear me, when I think of the time when she and I were girls together! Who would have thought that I should have been the one to toil up here in the sun, while *she* drove in her carriage. Oh, yes, that's very true, she was born the richest—but some girls have better luck than others! It was mine, you see, to marry a poor clergyman. Ah, well, I daresay Cherry would give her head to be in my place now!'

'And you in hers? Is that what you mean, mamma?'

'Me in hers! I'd like to be in her house, if that's what you mean; but me a fanciful, discontented, soured old maid—me!'

'Then, mamma dear, if you are better off in one way and she in another, you are equal,' said Agnes, somewhat crossly; 'that's compensation. Have not you rested long enough?'

Agnes was in the uncomfortable position of an involuntary critic. She had been used to hear a great deal about the Miss Beresfords all her life, and only a little while before had awoke out of the tranquil satisfaction of use and wont, to wonder if all this abuse was justifiable. She stood under the tree with her back to her mother, looking out upon the view with an impatient sadness in her face. She was fond of her mother; but to hear so many unnecessary animadversions vexed and ashamed her, and the only way in which she could show this was by an angry tone and demeanour, which sat very badly upon her innocent countenance and ingenuous looks.

Just then they heard the sound of footsteps coming towards them, and voices softly clear in the warm air. 'But, Cara, we must not be so ready to blame. All of us do wrong sometimes—not only little girls, but people who are grown up.'

'Then, Aunt Cherry, you ought not, and one ought to blame you. A little child who cannot read—yes, perhaps that ought to be excused—it does not know; but us——'

'We do wrong, too, every day, every minute, Cara. You will learn that as you grow

older, and learn to be kind, I hope, and forgive.'

'I shall never learn that.'

They came within sight as these words were said. Miss Cherry, in a cool grey gown, with a broad hat which Mrs. Burchell thought far too young for her; little Cara in her white frock, the shadows speckling and waving over her, erect as a little white pillar, carrying herself so straight. They made a pretty picture coming down the brown mossy path all broken up by big roots under the cool shade of the trees. On the bank behind them were low forests of coarse fern, and a bundle of foxgloves flowering high up on a brown knoll. The cool and tranquil look of them felt almost like an insult to the hot and panting wayfarers who had toiled up the path this hot day. Mrs. Burchell was in black silk, as became her age and position; she had a great deal of dark hair, and, though she blamed Miss Cherry for it, she, too, wore a hat; but, though she had been resting for ten minutes, she was still red and panting. 'Ah, Cherry,' she said, 'how lucky you are coming down-hill while we have been climbing! Some people have always the best of it. It makes me feel

hotter and hotter to see you so cool and so much at your ease.'

'We have come to meet you,' said Miss Cherry, 'and we shall be equal the rest of the way, for we shall all climb. Little Dolly, will you drag me up? You are so big and so strong, and you like to help old ladies. Come.'

Dolly being a very little mite, more fit to be carried, was made very happy by this address. She stretched forth two fat, small hands, and made great pretences to drag her thin charge. 'But you must want to come, or I can't drag you,' she said.

'Dolly is a little, wise woman, and speaks proverbs and parables,' said Miss Cherry. 'Yes, dear, I want to come; but we must wait for mamma.'

'Oh, go on, you are light and airy; you have not been tried with a large family like me! You had better give me your arm, Agnes, for the rest of the way. What a pull it is! I don't think I should ever walk if I had my choice. If I could afford a pair of ponies like yours; but with so many children ponies are out of the question,' said Mrs. Burchell, still aggrieved. Miss Cherry looked wistfully at the pretty

daughter upon whose arm her friend laid a heavy hand.

'Perhaps we both have something that the other would like to have,' she said, mildly. 'I believe that is the way in life.'

'Oh, it would never do for you, a single woman, to wish for children! I consider that most improper,' said the rector's wife. 'Of course we all wished for husbands in our day, and some of us were successful and some weren't; but it isn't a subject to be talked of, pardon me, my dear Cherry, before young girls.'

Miss Cherry opened her mild eyes very wide, and then she blushed a delicate, overwhelming old-maidenly blush, one of those demonstrations of feeling which are almost more exquisite in the old than in the young. She did not make any reply. Mrs. Burchell went on in her daughter's ear: 'She is an old fool—look at her. Blushing! as if she were a young girl.'

'I can't blush when I please, mamma,' said Agnes; 'neither, I suppose, can she. Lean on me a little heavier; we shall soon get to the top now.'

Why, she *runs* actually,' said poor Mrs.

Burchell. 'She is as light as Dolly; she doesn't mind the hill. So, Cara, your papa and mamma have gone away again? Why don't they take you with them? I should think you are old enough now to go too. How different people are! Now, I can never bear to be separated from my children. I like them to go everywhere with me. It is quite astonishing the difference. Doesn't your Aunt Charity think it strange that they should always send you here?'

'Aunt Charity likes to have me,' said Cara; 'for mamma travels very fast, and I should get very tired. I think I like the Hill best. Mamma is not very strong, and I should have to stop all my lessons.'

'But you would not mind that, I should think. My girls are always so glad to get lessons over. They would go mad with joy to have their month's holiday, and I am sure so would you.'

'No,' said Cara; 'I am nearly twelve, and I can only play three or four tunes, and talk a little French with Aunt Cherry. We pronounce very badly,' she continued, with a blush. 'I know by the French people who come to see us in the Square.'

'You poor child! do you mean to say they let you stay up at night, and hear people talking in the drawing-room? How very wrong for you, both for your mind and health! that is what makes you so thin, I am sure; and you must hear a great many things that you ought not to hear.'

Cara opened her blue eyes very wide. She was on the whole gratified by the idea that she had heard things she ought not to hear. That perhaps accounted for her superior wisdom which she felt in herself.

'Mamma says I ought to learn to judge for myself,' she said, with dignity. 'When there is an argument going on I like to listen, and often she makes me tell her what I thought, and which side I take.'

Mrs. Burchell gave Agnes a significant look; and Agnes, it must be allowed, who heard little conversation which did not turn on personal subjects, was slightly horrified too.

'Poor child!' repeated the rector's wife; 'at your age!—and what kind of subjects do they talk about? It must be very bad for you.'

'Oh, about books chiefly!' said Cara, 'and

pictures—but I don't understand pictures—and sometimes about politics. I like that—about Ireland and Mr. Gladstone they talked once. And to hear the Frenchmen talk about Ireland—just as if it were Poland, papa said.'

'Well, I am sure it could not be much worse,' Mrs. Burchell said, after a pause of alarm. She did not know much about Ireland, except that they shot landlords there, and that when she advertised for a housemaid she said 'No Irish need apply;' and she knew nothing at all about Poland, and what the analogy was between them she had not an idea. She looked at Cara after this with a little awe; but naturally held fast by her censure, which no doubt must be just, though she could not tell how.

'It cannot be good for you to hear such talk as that,' she said. 'A good romp and go to bed at eight o'clock, that is what I hold with for my girls. You are a great deal too old for your age. Before you are eighteen, people will be taking you for five-and-twenty. To hear you talk, one would think you were eighteen now.'

'I wish they would,' said Cara; 'I don't like to be always thought a child. I have often

things I want to say just on my very lips. I know I could set the people right if I might but speak. But mamma holds up her finger, and I dare not. If I were eighteen, I should be grown up, and I might give my opinion—and twenty-five! Is Agnes twenty-five?'

'Agnes! you spiteful little thing!' cried the mother, getting redder and redder. Agnes was sixteen, and the eldest of five, so that to add anything to her age was very undesirable. Cara was too much bewildered to ask what it was which made her a 'spiteful little thing,' for just then they came to the final plateau, where the path reached the level of the lawn. And there, snipping away at her roses, was Miss Beresford herself, in a deep sun-bonnet and garden gloves, with a large pair of scissors in her hand, and two baskets at her feet. The roses were in the full flush of their second bloom, notwithstanding their mistress's fears. She was snipping off the withered flowers, the defective buds, and yellow leaves on one hand, and here and there making a savage dash at a sound twig infested by a colony of green flies, while she cut roses for the decoration of the room. One of the baskets was filled with

these flowers, and Miss Cherry, who had preceded them, had lifted this basket from the path, and was looking at it with a perplexed face.

'There's a "Malmaison" which is perfect,' said Miss Charity; 'and as for those "Giant of Battles"——' She liked to pronounce their names in her own way, scorning pretence, as she said; and she put down her nose into the basket with true satisfaction. The one thing in the world Miss Charity was a little 'off her head' about was a fine rose.

'They are fine flowers,' said Miss Cherry, very seriously, her soft voice relaxing, with no smile; 'but the stalks are so short! How am I to arrange them? unless you put them bolt upright, each one by itself, as they are in a rose show?'

'You don't think I'm going to sacrifice my buds,' said Miss Charity; 'never! I see you do it, and that dolt of a gardener, and it goes to my heart. Put them bolt upright; what could be better? or they do very well in flat dishes. You can't go wrong with roses; but sacrifice my buds—not for the world!'

'There is not one long enough to put in

one's belt,' said Miss Cherry, who looked half disposed to cry. 'We have more roses than anyone, but they never look nice, for they never have any stalks. I must think what is to be done. The flat dishes are not effective, and the pyramids are wearisome, and specimen glasses make the table like a child's garden.'

'There's a dinner party to-night,' said Miss Beresford; 'that's why Cherry is put out. Come to the arbour and sit down, you poor hot people. How very hot you look, to be sure! That is what it is to be stout. Neither Cherry nor I are stout, and it is a great advantage to us, especially in summer. Come, Maria, you shall have some tea.'

'I don't consider myself stout,' said Mrs. Burchell, offended. 'The mother of a large family naturally develops a little. "It would not do, my dear, if you were as slim as you were at twenty," my husband says to me; "only old maids are thin;" and if *he* likes it——'

'Yes; you see we're all old maids here,' said Miss Charity, with one of her hearty laughs. Her handsome old face shone cool at the bottom of the deep tunnel of her sun-bonnet, clear red and white, as if she had been twenty; and with

large, blue, undimmed eyes, from which little Cara had taken hers, and not from either father's or mother's. Cara, indeed, was considered by everybody 'the very image' of Miss Charity, and copied her somewhat, it must be allowed, in a longer step and more erect carriage than was common to little girls. Miss Charity put down her scissors in her other basket, while Miss Cherry bent her reflective and troubled countenance over the roses, and drew off her big garden gloves, and led the way to the arbour or bower, which was not so cockney an erection as its name portended. At that height, under the shadow of a group of big fragrant limes, in which two openings cleverly cut revealed the broad beautiful plain below, one with St. George's noble Castle in the midst of the leafy frame, the air was always fresh and sweet. By stretching your neck, as all the young Burchells knew, you could see the dusty road below, and the Rectory lying deep down in the shadow of the trees; but not a speck of dust made its way up to the soft velvet lawn, or entered at the ever-opened windows. 'Ah, yes, there's our poor little place, children; a very different place from this!' Mrs. Burchell

said, plaintively, as she sat down and began to fan herself once more.

'You once thought it a very nice little place, Maria,' said Miss Charity. 'I am afraid you are getting tired of the rector, good man——'

'I?' said Mrs. Burchell, 'tired of my husband! You little know him or me, or you would not say such a thing. Nobody except those who have a husband like mine can understand what a blessing it is——'

'We don't keep anything of the kind up here,' said Miss Charity; 'and here comes the tea. Cherry has gone in to have a cry over her roses. When one has not one thing to trouble about, one finds another. You because your house is not so big as ours; she because I cut the roses too short. We are but poor creatures, the best of us. Well, what's the news, Maria? I always expect a budget of news when I see you.'

The rector's wife, offended, began by various excuses, as that she was the last person in the world to hear anything, and that gossips knew better than to bring tales to her; but in the end unfolded her stores and satisfied Miss Charity,

who took a lively interest in her fellow-creatures, and loved to hear everything that was going on. By the time this recital was fairly begun Miss Cherry came back, carrying with her own hands a bowl of creamy milk for little Dolly, who clung to her skirts and went with her wherever she went. Mrs. Burchell sat in the summer-house, which afforded a little shelter, and was safer as well as more decorous than the grass outside. When Cherry sat down with the children, Agnes had her gossip, too, to pour into the gentle old maiden's sympathetic ears. Agnes was in the crotchety stage of youth, when the newly-developed creature wants to be doing something for its fellows. She had tried the school and the parish, not with very great success. She wanted Miss Cherry to tell her what to do. 'The schoolmistress can teach the girls better than I can. She shrugs her shoulders at me. She is certificated, and knows everything; and the old women are not at their ease. They talk about my dear papa, and what a beautiful sermon it was last Sunday. And mamma is busy with her housekeeping. Couldn't you tell me, dear Miss Cherry, anything a girl can do?' Miss Cherry somehow was a girl

herself, though she was old. It was more natural to appeal to her than even to mamma.

Dolly for her part drank her milk, and dipped her biscuit in it, and made 'a figure' of herself unnoticed by anybody, carrying on a monologue of her own all the time. And Cara sat on the lawn, with the leaves playing over her, flecking her pretty head and white frock with a perpetual coming and going of light and shadow. Cara said nothing to any one. She was looking out with her blue eyes well open, through the branches over big St. George's, upon that misty blueness which was the world.

CHAPTER V.

COMING HOME.

They stayed in Como till late in October, now here, now there, as caprice guided their steps. Sometimes Mrs. Beresford would be pleased to be quiet, to float about the lake in the boat, doing nothing, taking in the air and the sunshine; or to sit at her window watching the storms that would sometimes come with little warning, turning the lovely Italian lake in a moment into a wild Highland loch—a transformation which always delighted her. She liked the storms, until one day a boat was upset, which had a great effect upon her mind. The people about her thought her heartless in her investigations into this accident, which threw several poor families into dire trouble and sorrow.

'Would the men die directly?' she asked;

'or would they have time to think and time to struggle?'

Her husband reminded her of the common idea that all the scenes of your life came before you, as in a panorama, when you were drowning. 'I should not like that,' she said, with a shiver. Then Abbondio interposed, he to whom the boat belonged which the Beresfords hired, and told how he had been drowned once.

'They brought me back,' he said; 'and I shall have to die twice now, which is hard upon a man; for I was gone; if they had not brought me back, I should never have known anything more. No, Signora, I did not see all that had happened in my life. I felt only that I had slipped the net, and was grasping and grasping at it, and could not get it.'

'That was painful,' she said, eagerly.

'It was a confusion,' said the fisherman.

Mrs. Beresford called to her husband to give him some money for the poor widows who had lost their men in the boat. 'A confusion!' she said to herself, dreamily. It was a very still day after the storm, and she had been looking with a strange wistfulness at the soft blue ripples of the water which had drowned these

men. 'A confusion! How strange it is that we know so little about dying! A lingering death would be good for that, that you could write it down hour by hour that others might know.'

'One would not be able,' said her husband; 'besides, I think everything gets misty; and one ceases to be interested about other people. I don't much believe those stories that represent passionate feeling in the dying. The soul gets languid. Did I ever tell you what a friend of mine said who was dead like Abbondio till the doctors got hold of her and forced her back?'

'No,' she said, growing very pale; 'tell me, James.'

'She told me that she felt nothing that was painful, but as if she was floating away on the sea somewhere about Capri, where she had once been. Do you remember the sea there, how blue it is about those great Faraglioni rocks? And there she was floating—floating—not suffering; mind and body, all softly afloat; until they got hold of her, as I say, and forced her back.'

'Ah!' said Mrs. Beresford, with a shiver; 'I should not like to be forced back. Poor

soul! She will have to die once again some time; but if it was only like that, she will not be much afraid.'

'She was as far gone as she could go, to come back, I have heard. What queer talk this is, my darling! The accident has spoiled all our pleasure.'

'No; it is pleasant talk. I like that idea of floating; it is better, far better, than Abbondio's confusion; but that, I suppose, was because of the suddenness in his case, and clutching at something perhaps as he got into the water. It was not an accident with her, was it? She was dying of an illness as we poor women do.'

'And most men, Annie; the greater part of us all.'

'Yes, yes; I know. Poor woman! And they brought her back?'

'Her family was round her bed, my darling, praying for her life, asking nothing but to get her back. You don't consider her children, and her husband. Don't let us talk of it. It makes me think of jumping into this wicked lake, and getting it all over.'

'Ah! do you feel that *too*? It is wicked, James; how dare you think such things? Take

me back home ; yes, home. I am tired of this place. It is all very well when it is fine, but winter is coming. To-morrow let us go home.'

He took her to the shore with a few long sweeps of the oars, glad in his heart of that decision. He, too, was very tired of the place ; more tired of the eternal shining than of the storm, and it was getting late in the year for the Alps. Nevertheless it was by the Alps that this capricious woman insisted upon returning, and they had something very near an accident in the snows which roused and pleased her mightily. After the excitement, however, nothing would satisfy her but to rush to London with the utmost speed. She objected to stay even a single night in Paris. She had been seized with a passion of longing for the humdrum Square.

Miss Cherry brought Cara up from Sunninghill to be at home to receive her mother. But the pair of travellers had stolen a march upon the household, and instead of waiting to be received in a proper manner in the evening, with dinner ready and everything comfortable, had arrived at an absurd hour in the morning, before the maids were out of bed, and when

there was nothing prepared in the house. Cook herself came, much aggrieved, to tell Miss Cherry this, while Cara ran upstairs to her mother's room. 'I don't make no doubt as folks get very fanciful when they're ill; but still, Miss, there's reason in all things. At six o'clock in the morning, and we not up, as why should we be, not thinking of nothing of the sort, and not a thing in the house?'

'It was hard, cook,' said the sympathetic Miss Cherry; 'but then you know my brother had a right to come to his own house when he pleased. Coming home is not like going anywhere else. But I hope Mrs. Beresford is looking better?'

'Better!' said cook, spreading out her hands; and Sarah, the housemaid, shook her head and put her apron to her eyes.

'Dear, dear!' said kind Miss Cherry, appalled by their tears; 'but travelling all night makes any one look ill. I shall not go up until she has had a good look at her child. Miss Cara is like a little rose.'

'So she is, Miss, bless her!' assented the maids; and Cherry had to wait for a long time in the library before even her brother came to

her. One thing which struck her with great surprise was, that there were no boxes about half emptied, in which precious fragilities had been packed in straw and wicker cases. The Buen Retiro cup was the only thing they had bought, and that was among Mrs. Beresford's things—smashed; and they had both forgotten its very existence. No more wonderful sign could have been of the changed times.

When Miss Cherry in her turn was introduced into the bedroom in which Mrs. Beresford still lay, resting herself, she all but cried out with sudden panic. She only just stopped herself in time; her mouth was open; her tongue in the very act of forming the 'Oh!' when her brother's look stopped her. Not that he saw what she was going to say, or all the effect his wife's changed looks had upon her. He himself had got used to them. He asked her, half aside, 'How do you think she is looking?' with an eager look in his eyes.

'She is looking—tired,' said Miss Cherry. 'Most people do after travelling all night. I could not have lifted my head from the pillow; but Annie had always so much spirit.'

'Yes; she has no end of spirit,' said poor

James Beresford, looking admiringly at his wife. He flattered himself, poor fellow! that Cherry had not remarked the thinness of the worn face, beside which her own faintly-coloured old maid's countenance almost looked fresh and round and blooming. He had been alarmed at the thought of what 'they' would think of her looks; but now his spirits rose. Cherry did not seem to have remarked it; and what a hypocrite poor Cherry felt, sitting there smiling, with her heart sinking more and more every moment! 'What will he do without his wife?' she was asking herself. And, alas! that wife's worn looks; her fretful little outbursts of impatience; all her caprices and restlessness betrayed a progress of evil more rapid than anyone had even feared.

'Does Mr. Maxwell know you have come back? He will want to see you. He was always so anxious to have news of you,' she said, falteringly.

'We have forgotten what doctors are like,' said Mrs. Beresford. 'I don't want ever to renew my acquaintance with them. James, send him a note and let him come to dinner. Yes, Cara! What has my pet got to say?'

'You said two different things at once, mamma—that you did not want to see doctors again, and that Mr. Maxwell was to come to dinner.'

'I told you she was an idealist,' said Mrs. Beresford, smiling. Then changing—as she had got into a way of doing—in a moment, she added, 'Get down from the bed, Cara; you tire me. There, sit there, further back. Children flutter so; they are always in motion. Cherry is still—she is a comfort; and, James, Mrs. Meredith can come, if she likes to come before I get up. She is a soft, tranquil woman, like Cherry; silly, perhaps, but that does not matter. When one is over tired, silly people who don't fatigue one are the best——'

'I wonder does she think me silly?' Miss Cherry said to herself; and it is to be feared there was not much doubt on the subject. After she had made this speech about Mrs. Meredith, next door, the invalid sent them all away, that she might rest. This was no more than a passing fancy, like other notions that flitted across her restless brain. They went down softly to the library, avoiding by common consent the drawing-room, which was *her* room,

and so closely associated with all her ways. There James Beresford interrogated his sister very closely. 'You don't see a very great change—nothing more than you expected?' He was tired, too, poor fellow! worn out in body and in soul.

'I think you should see Mr. Maxwell at once,' said Miss Cherry, who was timid, and did not like to commit herself. 'What does it matter what I think, who don't know? I think she is perhaps—more worn than I expected; but then she has been travelling all night. Perhaps you ought not to have allowed her to do so much.'

'I? How could I help it? and I was too thankful to get home. How I hate those pleasure places! the more beautiful they are, the more terrible. I detest them. I shall never be able to endure mountains and lakes again—till Annie is better,' he added, with such a miserable pretence at a smile that his kind sister almost broke down. She made up her mind to remain at his entreaty, though both of them had a doubt whether the invalid would like it. 'Annie will be pleased, I am sure,' he said, with hesitation. How well they all understood her!

But quiet Miss Cherry felt no anger with the fanciful, capricious, suffering woman, who meant happiness in this house, notwithstanding all her uncertain moods and ways.

'I will tell her I have something to do in town, and ask her to give me a bed for a few nights.'

'Aunt Cherry, you had nothing to do when we started; you meant to go home to-day.'

'Yes, Cara; but I should like to see your mamma get a little better.'

'Then please tell her so,' said the child; '*please* tell her so. I know what you think. You think she is very, very ill; but you will not say it. You try to deceive papa and me, and her too. I cannot bear to be deceived.'

'My dear, some time or other you will learn to know that one must not say everything one thinks; though indeed, indeed, I would always have you say the truth.'

'I shall never learn not to say what I think,' said the little girl, with erect head and severe blue eyes fixed upon her aunt disapprovingly. Miss Cherry was nervous and easily disturbed. She could not bear even Cara's disapproval, and she began to cry in spite of herself, even then

not quite ingenuously she felt ; for her disturbed nerves and her distress and sympathy for her brother were at the bottom of her emotion, though Cara's severity gave an immediate reason for her tears.

Mrs. Beresford was better in the evening, and came down to dinner, putting on one of her prettiest dresses in honour of the return. 'I have worn nothing but grey alpaca for months,' she said ; 'like you, Cherry ; I am quite glad to get out of it, and feel at home again. We have had rather a long spell of honeymooning this time, and we were beginning to get tired of each other ; but it was the last, you know, for Cara is to go with us next year.'

Cara, who was sitting by, began to speak. 'If——,' she said, and then stopped, arrested in spite of herself by such a passionate look as she had never seen before in her father's eyes.

'If—what? You think I shall change my mind? Ah, Mr. Maxwell, how do you do! Am I feeling strong? Well, not strong, perhaps, but very well to-night. I have ups and downs. And poor James there, whom I have punished severely, will tell you I have grown

the most fanciful, troublesome, capricious wo man. James!'

He had taken Cara into a corner, and was whispering to her in a voice which made the child tremble: 'If you say a word! if you vex your mother or frighten her with that idiotic sincerity of yours, by Heaven I'll kill you!' he said, clenching his hand. 'Capricious! Yes, you never saw anything like it, Maxwell. Such a round as she has led me—such a life as I have had!' And he laughed. Heaven help them! they all laughed, pretending to see the joke. While the child in the corner, her little frame thrilling in every nerve with that strange, violent whisper, the first roughness that had ever come her way, sat staring at the group in a trance of wonder. What did it mean? Why were they false all of them, crying when she was not there, pretending to laugh as soon as they turned to her. It was Cara's first introduction to the mysteries of life.

That night when Miss Cherry had cried herself almost blind, after a stolen interview with the doctor in the passage as he left the house, she was frightened nearly out of her wits by a sudden apparition. It was late, for

Cherry, though used to early hours, had not been able to think of sleep after the doctor's melancholy shake of the head and whisper of 'I fear the worst.' She was sitting sadly thinking of what that pretty house would be with the mistress gone. What would become of James? Some men have work to occupy them. Some men are absorbed in the outdoor life which makes a woman less a companion to them, perpetual and cherished; but James! Cherry Beresford was so different a woman from her sister-in-law, that the affection between them had been limited, and almost conventional—the enforced union of relations, not anything spontaneous; for where mutual understanding is not, there cannot be much love. But this did not blind her perception as to what his wife was to James. She herself had not been very much to him, nor he to her. They had loved each other calmly, like brother and sister, but they had not been companions since they were children. Cherry, who was very simple and true, not deceiving herself any more than other people, knew very well that she could never fill for him anything of the place his wife had left vacant. Her heart would

bleed for him; but that was all—and what would become of him? She shivered and wept at the thought, but could think of nothing—nothing! What would poor James do?

Then Cara came stalking in upon her in her nightgown, with a candle in her hand, white and chill as a little ghost, her face very pale, her brown hair hanging about her shoulders, her white bare feet showing below her night-dress, all lighted up by the candle she carried. 'I have come to ask you what it all means,' the child said; 'none of you say what is true. You laugh when I can see you are more like crying, and you make jokes, and you tell—lies. Have you all gone mad, Aunt Cherry? or what does it mean?'

Upon this a little burst of impatience came to Miss Cherry, which was an ease to her over-wrought feelings. You disagreeable, tiresome little child! How dare you make yourself a judge of other people? Are you so wise or so sensible that you should be able to say exactly what is right and what is wrong? I wonder at you, Cara! When you see us unhappy, all upset and miserable, about your poor mamma.'

'But why? To tell me—lies, will that make her well?'

'You should have been whipt,' cried the indignant lady. 'Oh, you should have been whipt when you were a small child, and then you never would have dared to speak so to me, and to your poor father, whose heart is broken! Would you like us to go and tell her how ill she is, and beg of her to make haste and die? Poor, poor Annie! that is what would be best for her, to get rid of the pain. Is that what you would like us to do?'

'Oh, Aunt Cherry, Aunt Cherry! don't say that mamma—that mamma——'

'No, my darling, I can't say it,' cried Miss Cherry, drawing the child into her arms, kissing and crying over her. 'I won't say it. I'll never, never give up hope. Doctors are deceived every day. Nobody can tell what may happen, and God hears prayers when we pray with all our hearts. But that's why we hide our feelings, Cara; why we laugh, dear, when we would like to cry; why we try to talk as if we were happy when we are very sad; for she would give up hope if she once knew——'

'And would that make any difference?' said the child, in all the impenetrability of wonder, one revelation bursting upon her after another, feeling this new dark mysterious world beyond her powers.

'Would hope make any difference?' cried Miss Cherry. 'Oh, child, how little you know! It is hope that makes all the difference. If you think things are going well, it helps them to go well—it keeps up your strength, it cheers your heart, it makes you a different creature. Everything, everything, lies in keeping up hope.'

'I don't understand,' said Cara, slowly. She had pushed open a door unawares into a spiritual world of which she knew nothing. She had not one of the happy superficial natures which sail over mysteries. That which was deeper than fact and truer than truth was a perplexity and aching wonder to the child. She could not fathom it, she had but just discovered it. She stood quite still while Miss Cherry explained to her as well as she could how nothing must be said or done that would alarm the patient, how everything must be made smooth and kept cheerful round her. 'And, Cara, you will remember—you will say

nothing to frighten her, whatever you may hear. If she should suffer very much, you must always look as if you felt sure she would soon be better.'

'Even if it is not true?'

'Oh, my dear child! the only way to mend that is to pray to God day and night, day and night, to make it true! He can and He will—or, oh, Cara! we hope He will,' cried Miss Cherry, with tears. 'And you can help by always praying, and always being cheerful. Look at your poor papa, how he smiles and jokes, and his heart is breaking all the time.'

'His heart is breaking!' said Cara, under her breath.

'But if we all do what we can, and are cheerful, and trust in God, she may get better, dear. There is so much we can do. That is how I try to keep up my heart. We must never look frightened, never let her get alarmed. Keep cheerful, cheerful, Cara, whatever we do.'

The child went back to bed with her head buzzing full of strange thoughts. She knew very well that nurse had often exhorted her to patience under toothache, for instance, as the best cure; but it never had been cured by that

in Cara's experience. Was cheerfulness likely to answer in her mother's case, and smiles instead of crying, and people saying things they did not believe? Such knowledge was too high for her. It confused her head, and made it ache and throb with the multitude of her thoughts.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CONSULTATION.

'YES, Miss Carry, if you like. Your dear mamma is falling into a doze; and I don't wonder, poor dear, after all those doctors a-poking and fingering. Oh, it turns my heart sick! If I don't get a breath of air I'll die. Sit in the corner, honey, behind the curtains. Don't you tease her, nor talk to her; if she wants anything, ring the bell. There now, my darling, don't say as you haven't got your way. How that child has worried to get into the room!' said nurse, confidentially, as she went soft-footed and noiseless downstairs, with an anxious maid in attendance. 'But a sick-room ain't a place for a child. It's bad enough for the like of me.'

'Yes, poor soul! I can't think how you stand it night and day as you do,' said Sarah the housemaid, under her breath.

'Bless you, I'm used to it,' she said; 'but

there's things as I can't bear. Them doctors a-staring and a-poking, and looking as if they knowed everything. What do they know more than me? It's experience does it, not their Latin and their wise looks. I know well enough what they'll say—and I could have said it myself and welcome, 'stead of taking all that money out of master's pocket, as can't do good to nobody. I'd have said it as easy as they could—allowing as it's any good to say it, which is what I can't see.'

'What is it then, nursey?' said Sarah. 'It seems awkward like, when folks comes with kind inquiries, never to know no more nor the door you're opening. But I won't say a word,' she added, contradictory but coaxing, 'if you mind.'

'I'll warrant as you won't,' said nurse; and so disappeared down the kitchen stairs to snatch that cup of tea which is the saving of poor women. 'And make it strong, do, or I can't go through with it much longer,' she said, throwing herself into a chair.

This was some months after the homecoming of the invalid. Mrs. Beresford had ralleid, and spent a pleasant Christmas with her

friends round her once more, and she recovered her looks a little, and raised high hopes in all those who watched her so curiously. But just as spring began to touch the Square, and the crocuses appeared, a sudden and rapid relapse had come on, and to-day there had been a consultation of the doctors of a kind which could not be mistaken, so deeply serious was it. They were in Mr. Beresford's study while nurse went downstairs, and he had just been called in solemnly from the next room to hear her fate, which implied his own. She had dropped into an uneasy sleep when her trial was over, too tired and worn out to be capable of more ; and it was during this moment that nurse had yielded to Cara's entreaties, made through the half-open door. The child had not seen her mother all day, and her whole being was penetrated by the sense of anxiety and foreboding that was in the house. She had wandered up and down the staircase all the time the doctors had been about, and her little, anxious face affected nurse with pity. It was the best thing for Cara to take the watch by her mother's side during this moment of suspense, as it was the best thing for nurse to get out of the sick-room and refresh

herself with change. Nurse's heart was heavy too, but not with suspense. There had been no mystery to her in the growing illness. She was an 'old-fashioned servant'—alas! of a very old-fashioned sort indeed; for few in any age, we fear, are those poetical retainers whose service is given for duty, not for need. Nurse served not for duty, indeed; to which word she might have objected—for was it not the duty 'of them as she had done everything for' to look after her, as much as hers to look after them?—but for love, which is a more effectual argument. She liked her good wages and her comforts, as an honest woman has a right to do; but she liked the 'family' better still, and cared not very much for any other family, not even that with which she was herself connected in the capacity of sister and aunt—for, though she had been married, she had no children of her own. Mrs. Beresford had been her child; then, so long after, Cara. Her heart was concentrated in those two. But after this trial of the medical examination, which was almost as hard upon her as upon her mistress, nurse was very thankful to take advantage of that door, and escape for a little into the more cheerful world of the

kitchen, with all its coming and going, and the cup of tea which cook, sympathetic and curious, and very anxious to hear all that could be heard, made for her with such friendly care.

Thus little Cara stole in and established herself noiselessly in the corner by her mother's bedside, hidden by the curtains. Many and strange had been the thoughts in the child's head through these winter months, since her parents came home. She had lived a very quiet life for a child since ever she could remember, though it was a happy life enough; and the curious baby rigidity of the little code of morals which she had formed for herself had been unbroken up to that time. Cara had felt that, whosoever did wrong ought to be hanged, beheaded, burnt, or whatsoever penalty was practicable, at once, without benefit of clergy. A lie being the worst possible offence that ever came within her ken, had been as murder in the swift and sudden vengeance of her thoughts. The offence had been considered capital, beyond the reach of pardon or extenuation. It is impossible to tell what horrible overthrow of all her canons ensued when her father and aunt not only sanctioned, but enforced, lying upon

her, and boldly avowed their practice of it themselves as a duty. Cara had lost herself for a long time after that. She had wandered through that bottomless darkness for months, and now had only just come to a glimmering of daylight again by aid of the individual argument, that though truth was necessary for the world in general, modifications were permitted in cases where people were ill—in the case of mamma being ill, which was the immediate thing before her. It was the one evil she was individually cognisant of in the world ; but the thing was to accept it, not struggle against it, as guilt which was justified by necessity. Cara felt that here was one thing upon which more light would come as one grew older—a prospect which generally this little idealist treated with the contempt it deserved. Mamma would be better then, she thought, and the world get back into its due balance and equilibrium without any one being the worse. Probably now that time was soon approaching, now that the doctors had come and found what was the matter, and probably very soon, Cara hoped, the worst of all her difficulties would be removed; and upon this doubtful subject she would be able to

get the opinion of the individual on whose behalf the others were defying Heaven with so much horrible daring, of mamma herself, for whom the sun and moon were being made to stand still, and all the world was put out of joint for the time. This hope was in her thoughts as she took her seat in nurse's big, softly-cushioned chair, which never creaked nor made any noise, and sat there as still as a mouse, sometimes not unlike a mouse, peeping round the corner of the curtain at her charge, who lay half buried among the pillows which her restlessness had thrown into disorder, with little starts and twitches of movement, and now and then a broken moan. Worn as she was, there was still beauty in the face—white and sharpened with pain, with red hectic spots upon it, like stains on the half-transparent flesh. Her hair had been pushed away under a cap, which had come loose, and only half confined the soft golden brown locks, which had not lost their lustre; she had thrown out one arm from under the bedclothes, which lay on the white coverlet, an ivory hand, half visible only through the lace and needlework of the sleeve. With what wondering awe and pity Cara looked at ner—

pity which was inexpressible, like all profound childish sentiments! Poor mamma! who suffered as she? for whom else did God permit the laws of truth to be broken? She was very fond of her beautiful mother, proud of her, and oh, so piteously sorry for her. Why should she be ill —she who hated it so much? Cara herself now and then was ill, and had to put up with it, without making any fuss. But mamma was different. The still child watched with a pity which was unfathomable, and beyond the reach of words.

The room was very still; it was at the back of the house, looking out upon nothing but gardens; so quiet that you could not have thought you were within reach of the full torrent of London life. The little *pétillement* of the fire, the occasional soft falling of the ashes, the ticking of the small, soft-toned clock, were the only audible sounds. It was a warm spring afternoon, and, but that Mrs. Beresford liked to see it, there was no need for a fire. It made the room warm and drowsy. How it was that, amid all her confused and troubled thoughts, such a reflective child as little Cara should have got drowsy too, who can tell? The stillness and quiet were unusual to her. She was leaning back against nurse's chair, her feet curled up,

her small frame entirely contained within it, her mother sleeping beside her, the room very still, with those soft rhythms of periodic sound. All at once she came to herself in a moment, after a lapse, the duration of which she knew nothing of. It was the sound of voices which roused her. Her mother speaking—her father, though how he got there she could not tell, standing, very haggard and pale, in front of the fire.

'You said you would tell me—oh, tell me the truth! I am tired of waiting, and of uncertainty. James, in pity, the truth!'

'Yes, my darling; but they came—to no decision. It is so long since Sir William saw you. You could not bear him, you know. He must come again—he must have time——'

'James! You are not telling me the truth!'

Cara saw that her father turned round to the fire, and held out his hands to it, as if he were cold. That change made his voice sound further away. 'Annie, Annie! do you think I would deceive you?' he said, faltering. Neither of them knew that the child was there behind the curtain, but of that Cara never thought.

'What did they say?' she cried. 'Oh, yes, you deceive me: you do nothing but deceive

me; and now, at least, I must know the truth. I will send for Maxwell to come back, and he will tell me—he is honest, not like you. James, James! have you no love for me left? You did love me once—and promised. What did they say? I *know* they have told you. You cannot hide it from me—it is in your face.'

He made no answer, but stooped down over the fire, so that his very profile might be hid from her. She could not see anything, he thought, in his shoulders—and yet the tremor in his frame, the very gesture told more plainly than words. She sat up in her bed, growing wild with eager energy. Her cap fell back, which had been loose before, and her long hair streamed over her shoulders. 'Bring me the medicine-box, quick, quick!' she cried. He ran to obey her, glad of the diversion, and knowing how often she had paroxysms of pain, which had to be stilled at all hazards. The neat little medicine-chest, with its orderly drawers and shelves, like a toy in tiny regularity and neatness, was kept in a closet at the other end of the room. He brought it out, and put it down on the table by her bedside. 'Is it the usual pain?' he said, his voice trembling. And now she

could see all the misery in his haggard face. She clutched with her white, feverish fingers at his arm.

'Tell me. You have heard—oh, I can see, you have heard—tell me, what do they say?'

He tried for a moment to get free; but what was the use? His face, all quivering with miserable excitement, his heavy eyes that would not look her in the face, his lips, not steady enough even to frame an excuse, were more telling than any words. She devoured his face with her strained eyes, holding him by his sleeve. Then, with a convulsive shiver, 'It is as I thought. I see what it is,' she cried.

'O my darling!' he said, sinking down on his knees by her bedside. 'What do they know? They are mistaken every day. How often have we said that, you and I? Why should we make gods of them now? Annie! we never believed in doctors, you and I!'

'I believe in them now,' she said. All her excitement had faded from her. The hectic red had disappeared from her cheeks, a convulsive shivering was all that remained of her strong excitement and emotion. She was hushed by the certainty. No doubt was in her mind as to

the truth of it. There was silence for a moment—a long, long time, as it seemed; and when the silence was broken, it was she who spoke, not in complaint or despair, but with a strange, chill wonder and reflective pain. 'There are some people who would not have minded so much,' she said, in a half whisper. 'Some people do not feel the pain so much—or—the loathing. O my God, my God, *me!*' What could be said? Hard sobs shook the man's helpless frame. He could do nothing for her—and she was dearer to him than his life.

'Do not cry,' she said, as if she had been talking to a child; 'that hurts me more. Don't you remember when we talked of it—if it ever came to this, James—and I made you promise. You promised. Surely, surely, you must remember? In summer, before we went away.'

He tried to look at her blankly, as if he did not know what she meant; but, God help him, he remembered every word.

'Yes; you know what I mean. I can see it in your eyes. You can't deceive me now, James! you promised!'

'Never! never!' he said, his voice broken with passionate sobs.

'I think you promised; but at least you said it was right—no wickedness in it. Oh, do it, James! You can save me still. Why should I have any more pain, now? I could bear it if it was for any good; but why should I *now*, James?'

'I cannot, I cannot,' he cried; 'do not ask me. Myself, if you will, but not you—not you!'

'Yourself!' she said, with a dreamy contempt. In her deadly danger and despair she was somehow raised above all creatures who had no warrant of death in them. 'Why yourself? You are safe; there is no vulture coming to gnaw *your* flesh. O James, have you not the heart of a man to save me! Think if it had been in India, in the Mutiny—and you said it would be right.'

'How could I know?' cried the unhappy man, with the artlessness of despair; 'how could I tell it was coming to us? I did not think what I was saying. I thought of others—strangers. Annie! oh, let me go!—let me go!'

'Think a moment,' she said, still holding him; 'think what it will be. Torment! It is hard to bear now, but nothing to what it will

be—and worse than torment. You will sicken at me; the place will be unendurable. O God! James, save me! oh, save me! It would be so easy—nothing but a dose, a drink—and all safe. James! James!'

The man burst out into terrible tears—he was beyond the stage at which self-restraint exists—but as for her, she was calm. It was she who held the chief place in this conflict. He was but secondary. The day, the moment was for him but one of many; his life would flow on the same as before, but hers had to stop if not now, yet immediately. She had her sentence delivered to her. And suddenly a fever of longing woke up in her—a desire to taste this strange death, at once to anticipate fate, like that vertigo which makes shipwrecked people plunge into the sea to meet their end a few minutes before it comes inevitably, forestalling it, not waiting for it. She rushed all at once into sudden energy and excitement.

'Come,' she cried, with a breathlessness which was half haste, half from the sudden acceleration of her heart. 'Come; this is the moment. There could be no time as good as now. I am not unhappy about it, nor sorry.

It is like champagne. James, if you love me, do it at once; do it now!'

He made no reply, but clung to the bed, hiding his face, with a convulsive shivering all over him. Was it that the excitement in her communicated itself to him, and that he was tempted to obey? There was a singing and a buzzing in his ears. Despair and misery stupefied him. Sooner or later she was to be taken from him: now, or a few weeks, a few months hence through a burning path of torture. And he could make it easy. Was it a devil or an angel that tugged at his heart, and echoed what she said?

'Come,' she said, in soft tones of pleading, 'cannot you see? I am in the right mind now. Death takes people constantly by surprise, but I am just as I should like to be, able to understand everything, able to feel what is happening to me, not in pain, or unhappy. Oh, quick, quick, James! you shall hold my hand, and as long as I can speak I will tell you how it feels; like your friend. You remember Como and the boat and the floating away. Quick, quick, while I am happy, out of pain, clear in my head!' Then her voice softened still more, and

a piteous smile came upon her face. 'Sorry only for you—O my James, my poor James! But you would rather send me away like this than see me perishing — perishing! Come, James!'

She loosed her hold upon him to let him rise, and he stumbled up to his feet like a man dazed, paused, looked at her; then throwing up his arms in a paroxysm of despair and misery, turned and fled from the room. 'Ah!' she gave a cry that he thought pursued him, echoing and echoing round his head as he rushed out of the house like a hunted man. But she had no power to pursue him, though her cry had. She sat up gazing after him, her arm stretched out, her head bent forward as when she was talking. Then her arm relaxed, her head drooped, a rush of womanish childish tears came to her eyes. Tears! at such a moment they made everything dim around her, but cleared away gradually like a mist, and once more the doomed woman saw clear. He was gone who should have been her loving executioner and saviour; but—her heart, which had sunk with the disappointment, gave another leap in her breast. He had left the

remedy in her hands. The little medicine-chest stood open beside her on the table, within her reach. She did not pause to think, but put out her hand and selected one of the bottles firmly yet trembling, trembling only in her nerves, not in her courage. It required a little effort to pluck it out of the closely-fitting case, and then she held death in her hands.

Just then a little rustle behind the curtain, a childish face peeping round the corner, disturbed her more than anything else in the world would have done. 'Mamma,' said Cara, 'what is that? What is that you are going to take? If papa would not give it you, can it be good for you? Oh, don't take it, mamma!'

Mrs. Beresford trembled so much that she could scarcely hold the bottle in her hand. 'It is something that will put my pain away,' she said, quite humbly. 'O Cara, my darling, I must take it; it will put away my pain!'

'Are you sure, quite sure?' said the child. 'Shall I ring for nurse, mamma, or shall I do it? My hand is quite steady. I can drop medicine as well as nurse can. Mamma, you are quite, quite sure it will do you good; then let me give it you.'

'No, no,' she said, with a low shriek and shudder, turning away from her. 'No, Cara, not for the world.'

'But I am very steady; and here is your glass, mamma.'

'God forbid!' she cried, 'not you, not you.' This last strange incident seemed to take from her the last excuse for delay, and hurried on her fate. She paused a moment, with her hands clasped close upon the little phial, and looked upward, her face inspired and shining with a wonderful solemnity. Then slowly she unclasped her fingers, sighed, and put it to her lips. It was not the right way to take medicine, poor little Cara thought, whose mind was all in a confusion, not knowing what to think. But the moment the deed was done, that solemn look which frightened Cara passed away from her mother's face. 'Ah!' she cried, fretfully, wiping her lips with her handkerchief, 'how nasty, how nasty it is! Give me a piece of sugar, a bit of biscuit, anything to put the taste away.'

Cara brought the biscuit, pleased to be of use. She picked up the bottle which had dropped out of her mother's hand, and put it

back tidily in the case. She smoothed the disordered pillow. Mamma had been vexed because papa would not tell her something, would not let her know the truth, which was precisely what Cara herself objected to in him; but perhaps papa might have reason on his side too, for she was not strong enough to be agitated. And no doubt he would come back presently and make amends. In the meantime it pleased Cara to be her mother's sole attendant; she put everything tidy with great care, drawing the coverlet straight, and smoothing the bed. The medicine-chest was too heavy for her to carry back to its proper place, but at least she put it exactly level upon the table, with the other things cosily arranged round it. Her mother, following her movements with drowsy eyes, smiled softly upon her. 'Cara, come here,' she said; 'come and give me a kiss. You will be good, and take care of papa?'

'Yes,' said Cara, astonished. She was almost frightened by the kiss, so clinging and solemn, which her mother gave her, not on her cheek, but her mouth. Then Mrs. Beresford dropped back on the pillow, her eyes closing. Cara had finished her tidying. She thought

the room looked more still than ever, and her patient more comfortable; and with a curious mixture of satisfaction and wonder she went back behind the curtain to nurse's big chair. Then her mother called her again; her eyes altogether closed this time, her voice like one half asleep.

'Cara, tell him I was not angry; tell him it is quite true—no pain, only floating, floating away.'

'What are you saying, mamma?'

'Floating, floating; he will know.' Then she half opened the drowsy eyes again, with a smile in them. 'Give me one kiss more, my Cara. I am going to sleep now.'

The child could not tell what made her heart beat so, and filled her with terror. She watched her mother for a moment, scarcely daring to draw her breath, and then rang the bell, with a confused desire to cry for help, though she could not have told why.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CATASTROPHE.

James Beresford was not brave. He was very kind and tender and good; but he had not courage to meet the darker emergencies of life. He felt as he rushed downstairs from his wife's presence that he had but postponed the evil day, and that many another dreadful argument on this subject, which was not within the range of arguing, lay before him. What could he say to her? He felt the abstract justice of her plea. A hopeless, miserable, lingering, loathsome disease, which wore out even love itself, and made death a longed-for relief instead of a calamity. What could he say when she appealed to him to release her from that anguish of waiting, and hasten the deliverance which only could come in one way? He could not say that it would be wicked or a sin; all that he could say was, that he had not the courage

to do it—had not the strength to put her away from him. Was it true, he asked himself, that he would rather watch out her lingering agonies than deprive himself of the sight of her, or consent to part with her a day sooner than he must? Was it himself he was thinking of alone, not her? Could he see her anguish and not dare to set her free? He knew that, in the case of another man, he would have counselled the harder self-sacrifice. But he, how could he do it? He rushed out of the house, through the afternoon sunshine, away to the first space he could find near, and struck across the open park, where there was no one to disturb him, avoiding all the pleasant walks and paths where people were. The open space and the silence subdued his excitement; and yet what could really bring him peace? He had no peace to look for—nothing but a renewed and ever-new painful struggle with her and with himself. Yes, even with himself. If she suffered greatly, he asked, with a shudder, how could he stand by and look on, knowing that he could deliver her? And would not she renew her prayers and cries to him for deliverance? God help him! It was

not as if he had made an end of that mad prayer once and for ever by refusing it. It would come back—he knew it would come back—hour by hour and day by day.

Oh, how people talk (he thought) of such mysteries when the trouble is not theirs! He himself had argued the question often, in her hearing, even with her support. He had made it as clear as day to himself and to others. He had asked what but cowardice—miserable cowardice—would keep a man from fulfilling this last dread, yet tender service? Only love would dare it—but love supreme, what will that not do, to save, to succour, to help, to deliver? Love was not love which would shrink and think of self. So he had often said with indignant, impassioned expansion of the heart—and she had listened and echoed what he said. All this returned to him as he rushed across the dewy grass, wet with spring rains, and untrodden by any other foot, with London vague in mists and muffled noises all round. Brave words—brave words! he remembered them, and his heart grew sick with self-pity. How did he know it was coming to *him*? How could he think that this case which was so

plain, so clear, should one day be his own? God and all good spirits have pity upon him! He would have bidden you to do it, praised you with tears of sympathy for that tremendous proof of love; but himself? He shrank, shrank, contracted within himself; retreated, crouching and slinking, from the house. What a poor cur he was, not worthy the name of man! but he could not do it; it was beyond the measure of his powers.

When he turned to go home the afternoon light was waning. Small heart had he to go home. If he could have escaped anywhere he would have been tempted to do so; and yet he was on the rack till he returned to her. Oh, that Heaven would give her that sweet patience, that angelical calm in suffering, which some women have! Was it only religious women who had that calm? He asked himself this question with a piteous helplessness; for neither he nor she had been religious in the ordinary sense of the word. They had been *good* so far as they knew how—enjoying themselves, yet without unkindness, nay, with true friendliness, charity, brotherly-heartedness to their neighbours; but as for God, they had known little

and thought less of that supreme vague Existence whom they accepted as a belief, without knowing Him as a person, or desiring to know. And now, perhaps, had their theory of life been different they might have been better prepared for this emergency. Was it so? He could not tell. Perhaps philosophy was enough with some strong natures, perhaps it was temperament. Who can tell how human creatures are moved; who touches the spring, and what the spring is, which makes one rebellious and another submissive, sweet as an angel? He had loved the movement, the variety, the indocility, the very caprice, of his wife, in all of which she was so much herself. Submission, resignedness, were not in that changeful, vivacious, wilful nature; but, oh, if only now the meekness of the more passive woman could somehow get transfused into her veins, the heavenly patience, the self courage that can meet anguish with a smile! There was Cherry, his faded old maiden sister—had it been she, it was in her to have drawn her cloak over the gnawing vulture, and borne her tortures without a sign of flinching. But even the very idea of this comparison hurt him while it flashed

through his mind. It was a slight to Annie to think that any one could bear this horrible fate more nobly than she. Poor Annie! by this time had she exhausted the first shock? Had she forgiven him? Was she asking for him? He turned, bewildered by all his dreary thoughts, and calmed a little by fatigue and silence, to go home once more.

It was getting dusk. As he passed the populous places of the park the hum of voices and pleasant sounds came over him dreamily like a waft of warmer air. He passed through that murmur of life and pleasure, and hurried along to the more silent stony streets among which his Square lay. As he approached he overtook Maxwell walking in the same direction, who looked at him with some suspicion. The two men accosted each other at the same moment.

'I wanted to see you. Come with me,' said Beresford; and——'What is the matter? Why did you send for me?' the doctor cried.

Then Maxwell explained that a hurried message had come for him more than an hour before, while he was out, and that he was on his way to the Square now.

'Has there been any—change?' he said. After this they sped along hurriedly with little conversation. There seemed something strange already about the house when they came in sight of it. The blinds were down in all the upper windows, but at the library appeared Cara's little white face looking eagerly out. She was looking out, but she did not see them, and an organ-man stood in front of the house grinding out the notes of the Trovatore's song 'Ah, che la morte,' upon his terrible instrument. Cara's eyes and attention seemed absorbed in this. James Beresford opened the door with his latch-key unobserved by any one, and went upstairs direct, followed by the doctor, to his wife's room.

How still it was! How dark! She was fond of light, and always had one of those tall moon-lamps, which were her favourites; there was no lamp in the room, however, now, but only some twinkling candles, and through the side window a glimmer of chill blue sky. Nurse rose as her master opened the door. She gave a low cry at the sight of him. 'Oh, don't come here, sir, don't come here!' she cried.

'Is she angry, still angry?' said poor Beresford, his countenance falling.

'Oh, go away, sir; it was the doctor we wanted!' said the woman.

Meantime Maxwell had pushed forward to the bedside. He gave a cry of dismay and horror, surprise taking from him all self-control. 'When did this happen?' he said.

James Beresford pressed forward too, pushing aside the woman who tried to prevent him; and there he saw—what? Not his wife: a pale, lovely image, still as she never was in her life, far away, passive, solemn, neither caring for him nor any one; beyond all pain or fear of pain. 'My God!' he said. He did not seem even to wonder. Suddenly it became quite clear to him that for years he had known exactly how this would be.

Maxwell put the husband, who stood stupefied, out of his way; he called the weeping nurse, who, now that there was nothing to conceal, gave free outlet to her sorrow. 'Oh, don't ask me, sir, I can't tell you!' she said among her sobs. 'Miss Carry rung the bell and I came. And from that to this never a word from her, no more than moans and hard breathing. I sent for you, sir, and then for the nearest as I could get. He came, but there was nothing as could

be done. If she took it herself or if it was give her, how can I tell? Miss Carry, poor child, she don't know what's happened; she's watching in the library for her papa. The medicine-box was on the table, sir, as you see. Oh, I don't hold with them medicine-boxes; they puts things into folk's heads? The other doctor said as it was laudanum; but if she took it, or if it was give her——'

Mr. Maxwell stopped the woman by a touch on the arm. Poor Beresford stood still there, supporting himself by the bed, gazing upon that which was no more his wife. His countenance was like that of one who had himself died; his mouth was open, the under lip dropped; the eyes strained and tearless. He heard, yet he did not hear what they were saying. Later it came back to his mind; at present he knew nothing of it. 'God help him!' said the doctor, turning away to the other end of the room. And there he heard the rest of the story. They left the two together who had been all in all to each other. Had he given her the quietus, he who loved her most, or had she taken it? This was what neither of them could tell. They stood whispering together while the husband, propping

himself by the bed, looked at her. At *her*? It was not her. He stood and looked and wondered, with a dull aching in him. No more—he could not go to her, call her by her name. A dreary, horrible sense that this still figure was some one else, a something new and unknown to him, another woman who was not his wife, came into his soul. He was frozen by the sudden shock; his blood turned into ice, his heart to stone. Annie! oh, heaven, no; not *that*; not the marble woman lying in her place? He was himself stone, but she was sculptured marble, a figure to put on a monument. Two hours of time—light, frivolous, flying hours—could not change flesh and blood into *that*; could not put life so far, and make it so impossible. He did not feel that he was bereaved, or a mourner, or that he had lost what he most loved; he felt only a stone, looking at stone, with a dull ache in him, and a dull consternation, nothing more. When Maxwell came and took him by the arm he obeyed stupidly, and went with his friend, not moving with any will of his own, but only because the other moved him; making no 'scene' or terrible demonstrations of misery. Maxwell led him downstairs,

holding him by the arm, as if he had been made of wood, and took him to the library, and thrust him into a chair, still in the same passive state. It was quite dark there, and Cara, roused from her partial trance of watching at the window, stumbled down from her chair at the sight of them, with a cry of alarm, yet relief, for the lamps outside had beguiled the child and kept her from perceiving how dark it had grown till she turned round. No one had thought of bringing in the lamp, of lighting the candles, or any of the common offices of life in that house where Death had so suddenly set up his seat. The doctor rang the bell and ordered lights and wine. He began to fear for James: his own mind was agitated with doubts, and a mingled severity and sympathy. He felt that whatever had happened he must find it out; but, whatever had happened, how could he do less than feel the sentiment of a brother for his friend? He did not take much notice of the child, but stooped and kissed her, being the friend of the house, and bade her go to her nurse in a softened tender tone. But he scarcely remarked that Cara did not go. Poor child, who had lost her mother! but his pity for her

was of a secondary kind. It was the man whom he had to think of—who had done it, perhaps—who, perhaps, was his wife's innocent murderer—yet whom, nevertheless, this good man felt his heart yearn and melt over. When the frightened servant came in, with red eyes, bringing the wine, Maxwell poured out some for the chief sufferer, who sat motionless where he had placed him, saying nothing. It was necessary to rouse him one way or other from this stupefaction of pain.

'Beresford,' he said curtly, 'listen to me; we must understand each other. It is you who have done this? Be frank with me—be open. it is either you or she herself. I have never met with such a case before; but I am not the man to be hard upon you. Beresford! James! think, my dear fellow, think; we were boys together; you can't suppose I'll be hard on you.'

'She asked me—she begged of me,' said Beresford, slowly. 'Maxwell, you are clever, you can do wonders.'

'I can't bring those back that have gone—*there*,' said the doctor, a sudden spasm coming in his throat. 'Don't speak of the impossible.

Clever—God knows! miserable bunglers, that is what we are, knowing nothing. James! I won't blame you; I would have done it myself in your place. Speak out; you need not have any reserves from me.'

'It isn't that. Maxwell, look here; they've spirited my wife away, and put *that* in her place.'

'God! he's going mad,' said the doctor, feeling his own head buzz and swim.

'No,' was the answer, with a sigh. 'No, I almost wish I could. I tell you it is not her. You saw it as well as I. That my wife? Maxwell——'

'It is all that remains of her,' said the doctor, sternly. 'Mind what I say; I must know; no more of this raving. Did you do it? Of course she asked you, poor soul!' (Here the doctor's voice wavered as if a gust of wind had blown it about.) 'She never could endure the thought of pain; she asked you, it was natural: and you gave her—opium?'

'Nothing. I dared not,' he said, with a shiver. 'I had not the courage. I let her plead; but I had not the courage. What? put her away from me, willingly? how could I do

it? Yes, if she had been in a paroxysm; if I had seen her in agony; but she was calm, not suffering, and she asked me to do it in cold blood?'

'What then?' The doctor spoke sternly, keeping the tone of authority to which in his stupefied state poor Beresford appeared to respond. Cara from a corner looked on with wide-open eyes, listening to everything.

'Nothing more,' he said, still sighing heavily. 'It was more than I could bear. I rushed away. I went out to calm myself—to try and think; and I met you, Maxwell; and now——'

He lifted his hands with a shuddering gesture. 'That is all—that is all! and this desolate place is my—home; and *that* is—Annie! No, no! Maxwell, some of your doctors—your cruel doctors—have taken her away to try their experiments. Oh, say it is so, and I'll thank you on my knees!'

'Be quiet, Beresford! Try and be a man. Don't you see what I have got to do? If it was not you, it was herself. I don't blame her, poor soul, poor soul! the thought of all she had to go through made her mad. Be silent, man,

I tell you! We must not have her branded with the name of suicide, James,' cried the doctor, fairly sobbing. 'Poor girl, poor girl! it is not much wonder if she was afraid; but we must not let them say ill of her now she is gone. I remember her before you married her, a lovely creature; and there she is, lying—but they must not speak ill of her. I'll say it was—— Yes, if it's a lie I can't help that—my conscience will bear it—there must not be talk, and an inquest. Yes, that's what I'll say.'

'An inquest!' said the wretched husband, waking up from his stupor with a great cry.

'I'll take it upon myself,' said Maxwell, going to the writing-table. Then he saw Cara leaning out of her chair towards them with great strained wide-open eyes.

'Cara! have you heard all we were saying?'

'I don't understand, I don't understand!' said the child with sudden sobs. 'What have you done to my mamma?'

The door of the library opened softly, and they all started as if at the approach of a new calamity.

'If you please, sir,' said John, addressing Maxwell with natural recognition of the only

source of authority, 'I came to see if you wouldn't have some dinner—and master——'

With a moan, Beresford hid his face in his hands. Dinner must be, whosoever lives or dies—if the world were breaking up—if hope and love had failed for ever. John stood for a moment against the more powerful light of the gas in the hall, for his answer, and then, not getting any, he had the grace to steal quietly away.

But this wonderful intrusion of the outer ordinary life disturbed the melancholy assembly. It roused Beresford to a sense of what had befallen him. He got up and began to pace up and down the long room, and Cara's sobs broke the silence, and Maxwell at the table, with a spasm in his throat, compiled the certificate of the death. In what medical form he put it I cannot tell; but he strained his conscience and said something which would pass, which nobody could contradict; was not that enough? 'I hope I may never do anything more wicked,' he said, muttering to himself. The nurse came to call the child, which was the first thing that had seemed natural to Cara in the whole miserable day's proceedings.

She did not resist the command to go to bed, as they had all resisted the invitation to dine. She got up quickly when nurse called her, glad of something she was used to.

'It's the only place as we're all fit for,' said nurse, with a sigh of weariness; 'your poor papa, Miss Carry, as well as the rest.' Then she turned to the gentlemen with a touch of natural oratory. 'What is the use of talking,' she said; 'I'm one as has loved her since first she drew breath. She was my child, she was; and look you here, I'm glad—her old nurse is glad. I'll not cry nor make no moan for her,' said nurse, the tears running down her cheeks. 'I'd have give her that dose myself if the darling had asked me; I would, and never have trembled. I'd have done it and stood up bold and told you I done it, and I don't blame her. She's seen what it was, and so have I.'

'Nurse, you are a good woman,' said the doctor, coming hastily forward and grasping her hand. 'Nurse, hold your tongue, and don't say a word. Don't let those idiots talk downstairs. I'm ready to give them the reason of it whoever asks. I did not know it would come on so quickly when I left to-day; but I know

what it is that has carried her off. It was to be expected, if we hadn't all been a parcel of fools.'

Nurse looked him anxiously in the face. 'Then it wasn't—it wasn't?—— Ah!' she added, drawing a long breath, 'I think I understand.'

'Now, hold your tongue,' he cried, curtly, 'and stop the others. You are a sensible woman. My poor little Cara, good-night.'

'Don't speak to him,' nurse whispered, drawing the child away. 'Leave your poor papa alone, darling. God help him, he can't say nothing to you to-night. Here's Sarah coming to put you to bed, and glad I'd be to be there too: it's the only place as we're fit for now.'

Sarah, who was waiting outside, had red eyes overflowing with tears. She hugged the little girl and kissed her, bursting out into fits of subdued crying. But Cara's own sobs were stilled and over. Her head ached with bewildering pain; her mind was full of confused bewildering thoughts.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONSOLATION.

'THIS is indeed an affliction, dear Miss Beresford. We came up directly we heard of it; I would not let a moment pass. Oh, how little we know! We were thinking of your poor niece as having returned from her foreign tour; as being about to enter upon the brilliant society of the season. I don't know when I have received such a shock; and my poor Maria, her feelings were almost beyond control; but she would not stay away.'

'I thought she would come,' said Miss Charity. 'Maria always likes to get news from the fountain-head, and to see how people are bearing their troubles. Yes, my dear, I am bearing mine very well, as you see. Poor Annie! she was only my niece by marriage after all. At my age one sees even one's own nieces, women with families, die without great

trouble. It may sound hard, but it's true. When a woman is married, and has her own children about her, you can't but feel that she's less to you. It's dreadful for *them*; but, so far as you are concerned, you lost her long ago.'

'Oh, dear Miss Beresford, you like to pretend you are calm, to hide how soft-hearted you are! But we know you better than that. I myself, though I knew (comparatively) so little of poor Mrs. James——'

'And I thought you did not like each other, so it is all the more kind of you to cry. Cherry will cry too as much as you please, and be thankful for your sympathy. Have you had a pleasant walk? I think the primroses are thicker than ever this spring. We have been sending up basketsful. She was fond of them——' Here the old lady faltered for a moment. This was the kind of allusion that melted her, not straightforward talk. She was in profound black, a great deal more crape than the dressmaker thought at all necessary, but Miss Charity had her own views on these subjects. 'Put double upon me, and take it off the child,' she had said, to the wonder of the tradespeople, who felt that the mourning for a

niece by marriage was a very different thing from that which was required for a mother. Mrs. Burchell respected her greatly for her crape. She knew the value of it, and the unthriftiness, and felt that this was indeed showing respect.

'We heard it was very sudden at last,' said the Rector, that nobody had the least idea—it was a very lingering disorder that she was supposed to have? So we heard, at least. Do you happen to know how the doctors accounted for its suddenness at last? There is something very dreadful to the imagination in so sudden a death.'

'I wish I could think I should have as quick an end,' said Miss Charity; 'but we Beresfords are strong, and die hard. We can't shake off life like that. We have to get rid of it by inches.'

'My dear lady,' said the Rector, 'I don't mean to say that I would put any trust in death-bed repentances; but surely it is a privilege to have that time left to us for solemn thought, for making sure that we are in the right way.'

'I never think much when I am ill, my dear Rector; I can't. I think why the flies buzz so, and I think if I was Martha it would make

me unhappy to have such a red nose; and if you came to me, instead of listening to what you said, I should be thinking all the time that your white tie was undone' (here the Rector furtively and nervously glanced down, and instinctively put up his hand to feel if the remark was true) 'or your coat rusty at the elbows. I say these things at a hazard, not that I ever remarked them,' she added, laughing. 'You are tidiness itself.'

The Rector was put out by these chance possibilities of criticism, and could not but feel that Miss Charity's quick eyes must have seen him with his white tie untidy, loosely unfastened, under his beard. He had grown a beard, like so many clergymen, and it was not an improvement. Instead of looking clean, as he once did, he looked black and coarse, a mixture of sea-captain and divine. He kept putting up his hand stealthily all the time he remained, and inviting his wife, with nervous glances, to let him know if all was right. Unfortunately he could not see it under the forest of black beard.

'We heard,' said his wife, coming to his relief, 'that there was something about an opiate —an over-dose, something of that sort—that

poor Mrs. James had taken it without measuring it, or—you know how everything is exaggerated. I was quite afraid, and so glad to see the death in the paper without any inquest or formalities of that kind, which must be so painful. Was there really nothing in the story of the opiate? It is so strange how things get about.'

'I don't think it at all strange, Maria. The servants call in a strange doctor, in their fright, who does not know anything about her case or temperament. He hears that she has to take some calming drops to relieve her pain, and of course he jumps in his ignorance to the idea of an over-dose. It is the fashionable thing now-a-days. It is what they all say——'

'And there was *no* truth in it?'

'None whatever,' said Miss Charity, who, safest of all advocates, implicitly believed what she was saying, not knowing that any doubt had ever existed on the subject. She sat facing them in her new mourning, so freshly, crisply black. Miss Charity knew of no mystery even, and her calm certainty had all the genuine force of truth.

The Rector and his wife looked at each other. 'It shows that one should not believe

the tenth part of what one hears,' he said. 'I was told confidently that poor Mrs. James Beresford held strange ideas about some things.'

'That you may be quite sure of, Rector. I never knew any one yet worth their salt who did not hold odd ideas about something——'

'Not about fundamentals, my dear lady. I am not straitlaced; but there are some matters —on some things, I am sure, none of us would like to give an uncertain sound. Life, for example—human life, is too sacred to be trifled with; but there is a set of speculatists, of false philosophers—I don't know what to call them —sceptics, infidels they generally are, and at the same time radicals, republicans——'

'Ah, politics? I dare say poor Annie was odd in politics. What did it matter? they were not political people. If James had been in Parliament, indeed, as I should like to have seen him—but unfortunately he was a man of fine tastes; that is fatal. A man of fine tastes, who is fond of travelling, and collecting, and rapt up in his wife, will never become a public man; and I should like to have seen James in Parliament. Strange ideas! oh, yes, queer to the last degree. If there is anything worse than

republicanism (is there?) I should think poor Annie went in for that.'

'That is bad enough, but it is not exactly what I meant,' said the Rector; and then he rose up with an air of the deepest conventional respect. 'My dear, here is your kind friend, Miss Cherry,' he said.

Mrs. Burchell sprang up at the intimation, and rushed forward with open arms. She had put on a black merino dress instead of her usual silk, and a black shawl, to mark her sense of the calamity—and swallowed up poor slim Miss Cherry in the entanglements of that embrace, with solemn fervour. Cherry had not much sense of humour, and she was too good to pass any judgment upon the sudden warmth of affection thus exhibited; but it was a little confusing and suffocating to find herself without any warning engulfed in Mrs. Burchell's old merino and the folds of her shawl.

'Oh, my dear, dear Cherry, if I could but tell you how I feel for you! How little did we think when we last met——'

'You are very kind,' said Miss Cherry, drawing herself forth somewhat limp and crushed from this embrace. 'I am sure you are very

kind.' Her lips quivered and the tears came to her eyes; but she was not so overwhelmed as her consoler, who had begun to sob. 'It is my poor brother I think of,' said Miss Cherry. 'It is little to us in comparison with what it is to him. I think of him most; more than of poor Annie, who is safe out of all trouble.'

'We must hope so, at least,' said the Rector, shaking his head; and his wife stopped sobbing, and interchanged a glance with him, which was full of meaning.

'Poor Mrs. James! It was so sudden. I fear there was no time for preparation—no time even for thought?'

'Men soon get the better of these things,' said Miss Charity, 'and the more they feel it at the time the more easily they are cured. Cherry there will think of her longer than her husband will. I don't mean to say your grief's so great, my dear, but it will last.'

'Oh, aunt, you do James injustice! He thought of nothing but Annie. The light of his eyes is gone, and the comfort of his house, and all he cares for in life.'

Here poor Miss Cherry, moved by her own eloquence, began to cry, picturing to herself

this dismal future. Nothing at Sunninghill was changed: the room was as full of primroses as the woods were; great baskets of them mingled with blue violets filled every corner; the sunshine came in unclouded; the whole place was bright. It struck the tender-hearted woman with sudden compunction: 'We are not touched,' she said; 'we have everything just the same as ever, as bright; but my poor James, in that house by himself; and the child! Oh, Aunt Charity, when I think of him, I feel as if my heart would break.'

Miss Charity took up her work and began to knit furiously. 'He will get over it,' she said, 'in time. It will be dreadful work at first; but he will get over it. He has plenty of friends, both men and women. Don't upset me with your talk; he will get over it—men always do.'

'And let us hope it will lead him to think more seriously,' said Mrs. Burchell. 'Oh, I am sure if you thought my dear husband could be of any use—we all know he has not been what we may call serious, and oh, dear Miss Beresford, would not this affliction be a cheap price to pay for it, if it brought him to a better state of mind?'

'His wife's life? It would be a high price for any advantage that would come to him, I think. Dry your eyes, Cherry, and go and put on your bonnet. This is Mr. Maxwell's day, and you had better go back to town with him.'

'Was it Mr. Maxwell who attended poor Mrs. James? I hope he is considered a clever man.'

'How oddly you good people speak! Do you want to insinuate that he is not a clever man? He takes charge of my health, you know, and he has kept me going long enough. Eh! yes, I am irritable, I suppose; we are all put out. You good quiet folks, with all your children about, nothing happening to you——'

'Indeed, Miss Beresford, you do us great injustice,' said Mrs. Burchell, stung, as was natural, by such an assertion, while the Rector slowly shook his head. 'We do not complain; but perhaps if we were to tell all, as some people do. Nothing happening to us!—ah, how little you know!'

'Well, well, let us say you have a great many troubles; you can feel then for other people. Ah, here is Mr. Maxwell. Don't talk of me now; don't think of me, my good man. I am as well—as well—a great deal better than a poor useless woman of nearly threescore and ten has

any right to be when the young are taken. How is James?'

The doctor, who had come in by the open window with a familiarity which made the Rector and his wife look at each other, sat down by the old lady's side and began to talk to her. Miss Cherry had gone to put on her bonnet, and by-and-by Mr. and Mrs. Burchell rose to take their leave.

'I am so glad to hear that, sad as it was, it was a natural death, and one that you expected,' said the Rector, taking Maxwell aside for a moment.

The doctor stared at him, with somewhat fiery eyes. 'A natural death? Mrs. Beresford's? What did you expect it to be?'

'Oh, my dear sir, I don't mean anything; We had heard very different accounts—so many things are said——'

'You should put a stop to them then,' said the other, who was not without temper; and he and Miss Charity paused in their sadder talk, as the visitors disappeared, to interchange some remarks about them which were not complimentary.

'What they can mean by making up such

wicked lies, and putting a slur on her memory, poor child!' said the old lady with a sudden gush of hot hears.

The doctor said something very hotly about 'meddlesome parsons,' and hastily plunged again into descriptions of poor James. The other was not a subject on which he could linger. 'I never saw a man so broken-hearted; they were always together; he misses her morning, noon, and night. Cherry must come to him; she must come at once,' he said, forgetting how long it was since he had spoken of Cherry before by her Christian name. But Miss Charity noticed it with the keen spectator instinct of her age, and ruminated in an undercurrent of thought even while she thought of 'poor James,' whether Maxwell's faith in Cherry 'meant anything,' or if new combinations of life might be involved in the sequences of that death scene.

The same thought was in the minds of the clerical pair as they went down the hill. 'Will *that* come to anything?' they said to each other.

'It is a nice little property,' said the Rector, 'and I suppose she will have everything.'

'But if I was Cherry,' said Mrs. Burchell, 'I should not like to be thrown at his head in that

very open way. Going with him to town! It is as good as offering her to him.'

'She is no longer young, my dear,' said the Rector, 'and people now-a-days have not your delicacy.'

'Oh, I have no patience with their nonsense!' she cried; 'and their friendships, forsooth—as if men and women could ever be friends!'

And it is possible that in other circumstances Miss Cherry's tranquil soul might have owned a flutter at thought of the escort which she accepted so quietly to-day; but she was absorbed with thoughts of her brother and of the possible use she might be, which was sweet to her, notwithstanding her grief. Miss Charity shook her head doubtfully. 'It is not Cherry that will help him,' she said, 'but the child will be the better of a woman in the house.'

Really that was what Mr. Maxwell wanted, a woman in the house; something to speak to, something to refer everything to; something to blame even, if things were not all right. The funeral was over, and all that dismal business which appals yet gives a temporary occupation and support to the sorrowful. And now the blank of common life had recommenced.

'Perhaps she will not help him much; but she will be there,' said the doctor. He was glad for himself that a soft-voiced, soft-eyed, pitying creature should be there. There was help in the mere fact, whatever she might say or do.

Cara had been living a strange life through these melancholy days. She had not known, poor child, the full significance of that scene by her mother's bedside, of which she had been a witness. She did not fully understand even now: but glimmers of horrible intelligence had come to her during that interview in the library, and the things she had heard afterwards from the servants had enlightened her still more. She heard the whispers that circulated among them, terrified whispers, said half under their breath. That she had done it herself—that she knew, poor dear, what she was doing—that if anything had been known, there would have been an inquest, and things would have come out. This was what Cara heard breathing about in half whispers, and which filled her with strange panic, lest her secret should escape her. She knew the secret, and she only. Nobody had questioned her, but the child's impulse to tell had bound her very soul for days after. She had

resisted it, though she had felt guilty and miserable to know something which no one else knew; but she had kept her secret. 'Don't let us brand her with the name of suicide.' These words seemed to ring in her ears night and day. She repeated them over and over to herself. 'Don't let us brand her with the name of suicide.'

'No, no,' poor Cara said to herself, trembling; 'no, no:' though this premature and horrible secret weighed down her heart like a visible burden. Oh, if she could but have told it to nurse, or to Aunt Cherry! but she must not, not even to papa. When her aunt arrived, it was mingled torture and relief to the poor child. She clung round her with sobbing, longing so to tell; but even to cling and to sob was consolatory, and Aunt Cherry wanted no explanation of that unusual depth of childish distress. 'Cara was not like other children,' she said to herself. She had feelings which were deeper and more tender. She was 'sensitive,' she was 'nervous.' She was more loving than the ordinary children, who cry one moment and forget the next. And kind Cherry, though her own grief was of the milder, secondary kind, as

was natural, had always tears of sympathy to give for the grief of others. She took the little girl almost entirely into her own care, and would talk to her for hours together; about being 'good,' about subduing all her little irritabilities, in order to please mamma, who was in heaven, and would be grieved in her happiness to think that her child was not 'good.' Cara was greatly awed and subdued by this talk. It hushed her, yet set her wondering; and those conversations were sometimes very strange ones, which went on between the two in their melancholy and silent hours.

'Does everybody go to heaven who dies?' said Cara, with awe-stricken looks.

Miss Cherry trembled a little, having some fear of false doctrine before her eyes. 'Everybody, I hope, who loves God. There are bad people, Cara; but we don't know them, you and I.'

'Who love God? but I never think of God, Aunt Cherry. At least, I do now; I wonder. But if they did not do that, would they still go to heaven all the same?'

'God loves us, dear,' said Cherry, with the tears in her soft eyes. 'Fathers and mothers

love their children, whether their children love them or not. That is all we know.'

'Whatever they do? if they even laugh, and go wrong? Yes,' said Cara, very thoughtfully, 'I suppose papa would not send me away, out into the dark, if I did ever so wrong.'

'I am sure he would not; but you must not think of such things, dear; they are too difficult for you. When you are older, you will understand better,' Cherry said, faltering, and with something in her heart which contradicted her; for did not the child 'understand' better than she?

Then Cara started another difficulty, quite as appalling; facing it with innocent confidence, yet wonder: 'What sort of a place,' she asked, softly, looking up with her blue eyes full of serious faith and awe, 'is heaven?'

'Oh, my dear,' said Miss Cherry, 'you ask me what I would give all I have in the world to know! There are so many whom I love there.'

'But what do you *think*? Often when one doesn't know, one has an *idea*. I don't know Italy, or India; but I imagine something. Aunt Cherry, tell me what you think.'

'Oh, Cara, my darling, I don't know what it is *like*! I know there is no trouble or pain in it; and that God is not so far off as here. No, He is not far off here; but we can't see Him; and we are such poor dull creatures. And I *think*, Cara, I *think* that our Lord must be always about there. That people may go and stand on the roadside and see Him pass, and talk to Him, and be satisfied about everything.'

'How—be satisfied about everything?'

'Oh, child! *I* should not want anything more. He sees both sides, my darling, both here and there, and understands. I am sure they must be able to speak to Him, and go to Him, whenever they will——'

This thought brought great tears, a suffusion of utter wistfulness yet heart-content, to Cherry's eyes. Little Cara did not know very well what was meant by such words. She did not understand this conception of the great Creator as a better taught child might have done. But she said to herself, all secretly: 'If there is One like *that*, whether it is in heaven or earth, I might tell Him, and it would be no harm.'

While Miss Cherry dried her eyes, her

heart lightened by that overflowing. Perhaps, though they had not seen Him, He had passed that way, and heard the babble—what was it more?—between the woman and the child.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HILL.

After this a long interval passed, which it is needless to describe in detail. Five years is a long time in a life; how much it does! Makes ties and breaks them, gives life and withdraws it, finds you happy and leaves you miserable, builds you up or plucks you down; and at the same time how little it does! Buffets you, caresses you, plays at shuttlecock with you; yet leaves you the same man or woman, unchanged. Most of this time James Beresford had spent in absences, now here, now there; not travels according to the old happy sense, though in a real and matter-of-fact sense they were more travels than those he had made so happily in the honeymooning days. But he did not like to use the word. He called his long voyages absences, nothing more. And they were of a very different kind from those expeditions of old. He avoided the Continent

as if pestilence had been there, and would not even cross it to get the mail at Brindisi, but went all the way round from Southampton when he went to the East. He went up the Nile, with a scientific party, observing some phenomena or other. He went to America in the same way. He was not a very good sailor, but he made up his mind to that as the best way of fighting through those lonely years. Once he went as far north as any but real Arctic explorers, with their souls in it, had ever done. Once he tracked the possible path of Russia across the wildest border wastes to the Indian frontier. He went everywhere languidly but persistently, seldom roused, but never discouraged. A man may be very brave outside, though he is not brave within; and weakness is linked to strength in ways beyond our guessing. He went into such wilds once, that they gave him an 'ovation' at the Geographical Society's meeting, not because of any information he had brought them, or anything he had done, but because he had been so far off, where so few people had ever been. And periodically he came back to the Square; he would not leave that familiar house. His wife's

drawing-room was kept just as she had liked it, though no one entered the room: the cook and John the butler, who had married, having the charge of everything. And when Mr. Beresford came back to England, he went home, living downstairs generally, with one of his travelling companions to bear him company. Maxwell and he had dropped apart. They were still by way of being fast friends, and doubtless, had one wanted the other, would still have proved so—last resource of friendship, in which the severed may still hope. But, as nothing happened to either, their relations waxed cold and distant. The doctor had never got clear of the suspicion which had risen in his mind at Mrs. Beresford's death. It is true that had James Beresford given the poor lady that 'strong sweet dose' she once had asked for, Maxwell would have forgiven his friend with all his heart. I do not know, in such a strange case, what the doctor could have done; probably exactly as he did afterwards do, invent a death-certificate which might be accepted as possible, though it was not in accordance with the facts. But, anyhow, he would have taken up warmly, and stood by his friend to his last gasp. This

being the case, it is impossible to tell on what principle it was that Maxwell half hated Beresford, having a lurking suspicion that he had done it—a suspicion contradicted by his own statement and by several of the facts. But this was the case. The man who would have helped his wife boldly, heart-brokenly, to escape from living agony, was one thing; but he who would give her a fatal draught, or connive at her getting it, and then veil himself so that no one should know, was different. So Mr. Maxwell thought. The inconsistency might be absurd; but it was so. They positively dropped out of acquaintance. The men who visited James Beresford when he was at home, were men with tags to their names, mystic initials, F.G.S.'s, F.R.S.'s, F.S.A.'s, and others of that class. And Maxwell, who was his oldest friend, dropped off. He said to himself that if Beresford ever wanted him badly, he would find his friendship surviving. But Beresford did not want Maxwell nor Maxwell Beresford; and thus they were severed for a suspicion which would not have severed them had it been a reality, or so at least Maxwell thought. The doctor still went down once a week regularly

to visit Miss Charity, and so kept up his knowledge of the family; but 'nothing came' of the old fancy that had been supposed to exist between him and Cherry. They all hardened down unconsciously, these middle-aged folk, in their various ways. The doctor became a little rougher, a little redder, a trifle more weather-beaten; and Miss Cherry grew imperceptibly more faded, more slim, more prim. As for Miss Charity, being now over seventy, she was younger than ever; her unwrinkled cheeks smoother, her blue eyes as blue, her step almost more alert, her garden more full of roses. 'After seventy,' she tersely said, 'one gets a new lease.' And Mrs. Burchell, at the Rectory, was a little stouter, and her husband a little more burly, and both of them more critical. Fifty is perhaps a less amiable age than three-score and ten. I am not sure that it is not the least amiable age of all; the one at which nature begins to resent the fact of growing old. Of all the elder generation, James Beresford was the one to whom it made least change, notwithstanding that he was the only one who had 'come through' any considerable struggle. He was still speculative, still fond of philoso-

phical talk, still slow to carry out to logical conclusions any of the somewhat daring theories which he loved to play with. He was as little affected as ever by what he believed and what he did not believe.

As for Cara, however, these five years had made a great difference to her; they had widened the skies over her head and the earth under her feet. Whereas she had been but twelve, a child, groping and often in the dark, now she was seventeen, and every new day that rose was a new wonder to her. Darkness had fled away, and the firmament all around her quivered and trembled with light; night but pretended to be, as in summer, when twilight meets twilight, and makes the moment of so-called midnight and darkness the merriest and sweetest of jests. Everything was bright around her feet, and before her in that flowery path which led through tracts of sunshine. She was no more afraid of life than the flowers are. Round about her the elders, who were her guides, and ought to have been her examples, were not, she might have perceived, had she paused to think, exuberantly happy. They had no blessedness to boast of, nor any exemption

from common ills; but it no more occurred to Cara to think that she, *she* could ever be like her good Aunt Cherry, or Mrs. Burchell, than that she could be turned into a blue bird, like the prince in the fairy tale. The one transformation would have been less wonderful than the other. She had lived chiefly at Sunninghill during her father's absence, and it was a favourite theory with the young Burchells, all but two (there were ten of them), that she would progress in time to be the Miss Cherry, and then the Miss Charity, of that maiden house. A fate was upon it, they said. It was always to be in the hands of a Miss Beresford, an old-maidish Charity, to be transmitted to another Charity after her. This was one of the favourite jokes of the rectorial household, warmly maintained except by two, *i.e.* Agnes, the eldest, a young woman full of aspirations; and Roger, the second boy, who had aspirations too, or rather who had one aspiration, of which Cara was the object. She would not die Charity Beresford if he could help it; but this was a secret design of which nobody knew. Cara's presence, it may be supposed, had made a great

deal of difference at Sunninghill. It had introduced a governess and a great many lessons; and it had introduced juvenile parties and an amount of fun unparalleled before in the neighbourhood. Not that she was a very merry child, though she was full of visionary happiness; but when she was there, there too was drawn everything the two other elder Charity Beresfords could think of as delightsome. The amusements of the princesses down in St. George's were infinitely less considered. To be sure there were many of them, and Cara was but one. She would have been quite happy enough in the garden, among the roses; but because this was the case she had every 'distraction' that love could think of, and all the young people in the neighbourhood had reason to rejoice that Cara Beresford had come to live with her aunts at Sunninghill.

However, these delights came to an end when Mr. Beresford came home at length 'to settle.' To say with what secret dismay, though external pleasure, this news was received at 'the Hill' would require a volume. The hearts of the ladies there sank into their shoes. They

did not dare to say anything but that they were delighted.

'Of course I am to be congratulated,' Miss Charity said, with a countenance that seemed to be cut out of stone. 'To see James settle down to his life again is the greatest desire I can have. What good was he to any one, wandering like that over the face of the earth? We might all have been dead and buried before we could have called him back.'

'Of course we are *delighted*,' said Miss Cherry, with a quaver in her voice. 'He is my only brother. People get separated when they come to our time of life, but James and I have always been one in heart. I am more glad than words can say.' And then she cried. But she was not a strong-minded or consistent person, and her little paradoxes surprised nobody. Miss Charity herself, however, who was not given to tears, made her blue eyes more muddy that first evening after the news came, than all her seventy years had made them. 'What is the child to do?' she asked abruptly when they were alone; 'of an age to be "out," and without a chaperon, or any sense in his head to teach him that such a thing is wanted?'

'You would not like him to marry again?' said Miss Cherry, blowing her agitated nose.

'I'd like him to have some sense, or sensible notions in his head, whatever he does. What is to become of the child?'

Alas! I fear it was, 'What is to become of us without her?' that filled their minds most.

It was autumn; the end of the season at which the Hill was most beautiful. It had its loveliness too in winter, when the wonderful branching of the trees—all that symmetry of line and network which summer hides with loving decorations—was made visible against the broader background of the skies, which gained infinitude from the dropping of those evanescent clouds of foliage. But the common mind rejected the idea of the Hill in winter as that place of bliss which it was acknowledged to be during the warmer half of the year. In autumn, however, the 'mists and mellow fruitfulness' of the great plain, the tints of fervid colour which came to the trees, the soft hazy distances and half-mournful brightness of the waning season, gave the place a special beauty. There were still abundant flowers fringing the lawn; blazing red salvias, geraniums, all the

warm-hued plants that reach the 'fall;' big hollyhocks flaunting behind backs, and languishing dahlias. Some late roses lingered still; the air was sweet with the faint soft perfume of mignonette; petunias, just on the point of toppling over into decay, made a flutter of white and lilac against the walls, and here and there a bunch of belated honeysuckle, or cluster of jessamine stars out of date, threw themselves forth upon the trellis. It was on the sweetest mellow autumnal day, warm as July, yet misty as October, that the Miss Beresfords had their last garden-party for Cara. All their parties were for Cara; but this was especially hers, her friends far and near coming to take leave of her, as her life at the Hill terminated.

'She goes just at the proper moment,' Miss Charity said, sitting out on the lawn in her white crape shawl, receiving her visitors, with St. George's and all the plain beyond shining through the autumn branches like a picture laid at her feet. 'She takes the full good of us to the last, and when winter comes, which lays us bare, she will be off with the other birds. She lasts just a little longer than the swallows,' said the old lady with a laugh.

'But you can't wonder, dear Mrs. Beresford, that she should wish to go to her father. What can come up to a father?' said Mrs. Burchell, meaning, it is to be supposed, to smooth over the wound.

Miss Charity lifted her big green fan ominously in her hand. It was closed, and it might have inflicted no slight blow; and, of all things in the world, it would have pleased the old lady most to bring it down smartly upon that fat hand, stuffed desperately into a tight purple glove, and very moist and discoloured by the confinement, which rested on the admirable clergywoman's knee.

Meanwhile Roger Burchell, who was bold, and did not miss his chances, had got Cara away from the croquet players and the talk, on pretence of showing her something. 'I am coming to see you in town,' he said. 'It is as easy to go there as to come here, and I shan't care for coming here when you are gone. So you need not say good-bye to me.'

'Very well,' said Cara, laughing; 'is that all? I don't mean to say good-bye to any one. I am not going for good. Of course I shall come back.'

'You will never come back just the same,' said Roger; 'but mind what I tell you. I mean to come to town. I have an aunt at Notting Hill. When I get leave from the college I shall go there. The old lady will be pleased; and so you shall see me every Sunday, just as you do now.'

'Every Sunday!' said Cara, slightly surprised. 'I don't mind, Roger; it can't matter to me; but I don't think they will like it here.'

'They will like it if you do,' said the enterprising youth. He was twenty, and soon about to enter on his profession, which was that of an engineer. He was not deeply concerned as to what his parents might feel; but at the same time he was perfectly confident of their appreciation of Cara as an excellent match, should that luck be his. This is not intended to mean that Roger thought of Cara as a good match. He had, on the contrary, an honest boyish love for her, quite true and genuine, if not of the highest kind. She was the prettiest girl he knew, and the sweetest. She was clever too in her way, though that was not his way. She was the sort of girl to be proud of, wherever you might go with her; and, in short, Roger was so fond

of Cara, that but for that brilliant of idea of his, of passing his Sundays with his aunt at Notting Hill instead of at home, her departure would have clouded heaven and earth for him. As it was, he felt the new was rather an improvement on the old; it would throw him into closer contact with the object of his love. Cara took the arrangement generally with great composure. She was glad enough to think of seeing some one on the dull Sundays; and somehow the Sundays used to be duller in the Square, where nobody minded them, than at the Hill, where they were kept in the most orthodox way. Thus she had no objection to Roger's visits; but the prospect did not excite her. 'I suppose you are soon going away somewhere?' she said, with great calm. 'Where are you going? to India? You cannot come from India to your aunt at Notting Hill.'

'But I shall not go—not as long as I can help it—not till——'

Here Roger looked at her with eager eyes. He was not handsome; he was stoutly built, like his father, with puffy cheeks and premature black whiskers. But his eyes at the present moment were full of fire. 'Not till——' How

much he meant by that broken phrase! and to Cara it meant just nothing at all. She did not even look at him, to meet his eyes, which were so full of ardour. But she was not disinclined to loiter along this walk instead of joining the crowd. She was thinking her own thoughts, not his.

'I wonder if papa will be changed? I wonder if the house will look strange? I wonder——' said Cara, half under her breath. She was not talking to him, yet perhaps if he had not been with her she would not have said the words aloud. He was a kind of shield to her from others, an unconscious half-companion. She did not mind what she said when he was there. Sometimes she replied to him at random; often he so answered her, not knowing what she meant. It was from want of comprehension on his part, not want of attention; but it was simple carelessness on hers. He listened to these wonderings of hers eagerly, with full determination to fathom what she meant.

'He will be changed, and so will the house,' said Roger. 'We may be sure of it. You were but a child when you left; now you are a—young lady. Even if he was not changed, you would think him so,' cried Roger, with insight

which surprised himself; 'but those who have grown up with you, Cara—I, for instance, who have seen you every day, I can never change. You may think so, but you will be mistaken. I shall always be the same.'

She turned to look at him, half amused, half wondering. 'You, Roger; but what has that to do with it?' she said. How little she cared! She had faith in him: oh, yes; did not think he would change; believed he would always be the same. What did it matter? It did not make her either sadder or gladder to know that it was unlikely there would be any alteration in him.

'What are you doing here, Cara, when you ought to be looking after your guests, or playing croquet, or amusing yourself?'

'I am amusing myself, Aunt Cherry, as much as I wish to amuse myself. It is not amusing to go away.'

'My darling, we must think of your poor father,' said Miss Cherry, her voice trembling; 'and there are all your young friends. Will you go and help to form that game, Roger? They want a gentleman. Cara, dear, I would rather you did not walk with Roger Burchell like this, when everybody is here.'

'He said he had something to show me,' said Cara. 'I was glad to get away. All this looks so like saying farewell; as if I might never be here again.'

'Cara, if you make me cry, I shall not be fit to be seen; and we must not make a show of ourselves before all these people.' Miss Cherry pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. 'I am so silly; my eyes get so red for nothing. What did Roger have to show you? He ought to be at work, that boy.'

'He has an aunt at Notting Hill,' said Cara, with a soft laugh; 'and he told me he meant to come to town on Sundays instead of coming here. He says he shall see me quite as often as usual. I suppose he thought I should miss him. Poor Roger! if that were all!'

'But, Cara, we must not allow that,' said Miss Cherry. 'I must speak to his mother. See him every Sunday, as usual! it is ridiculous; it must be put a stop to. Roger Burchell! a lad who is nobody, who has his way to make in the world, and neither connections, nor fortune, nor any advantage——'

Here Miss Cherry was arrested by Cara's look turned calmly upon her, without excite-

ment or anxiety, yet with that half-smile which shows when a young observer has seen the weak point in the elder's discourse.

'What should his connections or his fortune have to do with it if he wanted to see me and I wanted to see him?' said Cara; 'we have been friends all our lives. But do not make yourself uneasy, Aunt Cherry; for though I might, perhaps, like well enough to see Roger now and then, I don't want him every Sunday. What would papa say? Roger thinks Sunday in the Square is like Sunday here—church, and then a stroll, and then church again. You know it was not like that when I was at home before.'

'No,' said Miss Cherry, with a sigh; 'but then it was different.' She had her own thoughts as to whose fault that was, and by whose influence James had been led away from natural churchgoing; but she was far too loyal, both to the dead and to the living, to show this. 'Cara,' she added, hurriedly, 'in that respect, things will be as you like best hereafter. You will be the one to settle what Sunday is to be—and what a great many other things are to be. You must realise what is before you, my dear child.'

'I can't realise Roger there in papa's library,'

said Cara, 'or upstairs. Am I to live *there*? in the drawing-room. Will it never be changed?'

'It is so pretty, Cara—and you would like the things to be as pleased her,' said Miss Cherry, in trembling tones.

Cara did not make any response—her face wore a doubtful expression, but she did not say anything. She turned her back upon the landscape, and looked up at the house. 'Shall I never come back just the same?' she said. 'Roger says so; but he is not clever—how should he know? what should change me? But the Square is not like the Hill,' she added, with a little shiver. 'Papa will not think of me as you do—everything for Cara; that will make a change.'

'But you can think of him,' said Cherry, 'everything for *him*; and, perhaps, for a woman that is the happiest way of the two.'

Once more Cara was silent. Clouds of doubt, of reluctance, of unwilling repugnance, were floating through her mind. She had a horror and fear of the Square, in which her life was henceforward to be passed—and of her father, of whom she knew so much more than he was aware. For a moment the old tumult

in her soul about the secret she had never told came surging back upon her, a sudden tide from which she could scarcely escape. 'Come, Aunt Cherry,' she said, suddenly seizing her astonished companion by the arm. 'Come and play for us. We must have a dance on the lawn my last day.'

CHAPTER X.

THE SQUARE.

It was a rainy afternoon when Cara reached the Square. It had been settled, against Miss Cherry's will, that she was to go alone. The girl, who was often 'queer,' especially when anything connected with her natural home, her father's house, was in question, had requested that it should be so—and Miss Charity approved, to whose final decision everything was submitted at Sunninghill. 'Don't interfere with her,' Miss Charity had said; 'she is like her mother. She has a vein of caprice in her. You never could argue (if you remember) with poor Annie. You had either to give in to her, or to say no once for all, and stick to it. Carry is not like her mother all through—there are gleams of the Beresford in her. But there is a vein of caprice, and I wouldn't cross her, just at this crisis of her life.'

'But I don't see why it should be such a crisis. It is a change of scene, to be sure, and leaving us ought to be a trial,' said Miss Cherry, dubiously. The feeling within herself was, that she would have been glad had she been more sure that this was a trial. Girls were ungrateful in their lightheartedness, and sometimes loved the risks of independence. 'It is not as if she were going among strangers,' said Miss Cherry. 'She is going to her home, and to her father.'

'A father whom she has never known since she was a child—a house that has never lost the shadow of that dying!'

'Then why must not I go with her?' said Miss Cherry. The old lady shrugged her shoulders, but said no more. And Cara got her way. As she was to go alone, she was packed, with all her belongings, into the carriage; nurse going with her, who was to help in the housekeeping, and take care of the young mistress of the old familiar house. The railway, it is true, would have carried them there in half the time; but Cara liked the preparation of the long, silent drive, and it pleased the elder ladies that their darling should make her solitary

journey so to her father's house. The road led through beautiful royal parks, more than one, and by glimpses of the pleasant river. It was like an old-fashioned expedition made in the days before railways, with full time for all the anticipations, all the dreams, of what was to come. Though her mind was full of natural excitement and sadness, Cara could not help feeling herself like one of the heroines of Miss Austen's novels as she drove along. She had plenty of grave matters to think about, and was very much in earnest as to her life generally; yet, with the unconscious doubleness of youth, she could not help feeling only half herself, and half Elizabeth Bennet or Catherine Moreland going off into the world. And, indeed, without sharing the difficulties of these young ladies, Cara Beresford in her own person had no small problem before her. To fill the place of her mother, an accomplished woman, she who was only a girl; to make his home pleasant to her father; to set agoing once more something like family life. And she only seventeen, and so differently situated, she said to herself, from other girls! Had she not enough to think of? The trees and the bridges, the gleams of shining river,

the great stretches of wooded country, all glided past her like things in a dream. It was they that were moving, not she. Nurse talked now and then; but nurse's talking did not disturb Cara; she knew by long experience just how to put in convenient ayes and noes, so as to keep the good woman going. And thus she went on, her head full of thoughts. Her difficulties were more grave than those which generally fall to the lot of so young a girl—but, nevertheless, with the frivolity of youth, she could feel herself something like Catherine Moreland, hurrying along to Northanger Abbey, and all the wonders and mysteries there.

She had expected to find her father already arrived and awaiting her; but he did not come until she had been an hour or two in the house —which was half a relief and half an offence to her. She was received with a kind of worship by John and cook, to whom their young mistress, whom they had only known as a child, was a wonder and delight, and who mingled a greater degree of affectionate familiarity with the awe they ought to have felt for her than was quite consistent with Cara's dignity. They

were anxious to pet and make much of her on her arrival—cook hurrying upstairs, unnecessarily Cara thought, to show how prettily her room had been prepared; and John bringing her tea, with cake and the daintiest bread and butter, and a broad smile of pleasure on his face. Cara thought it incumbent upon her to send away the cake and bread and butter, taking only the tea, to prove beyond all power of misconception that she was no longer a child —but she was sorry for it after, when John, protesting and horrified, had carried it away downstairs again. Still, though one is slightly hungry, it is best to keep up one's dignity, and 'begin,' as Aunt Cherry said, 'as you meant to go on.' Cara would not let herself be governed by old servants, that she had determined—and it was best to show them at once that this could not be.

Then she went up with some shrinking, feeling like a sea-bather making the first plunge, into the drawing-room, which no one had used for the last five years. She was obliged to confess that it was very pretty, notwithstanding that it frightened her. She half expected some one to rise from the chair

before the first newly-lighted October fire to receive her as she went in. The little cabinets, the pretty brackets for the china, the scraps of old lace upon the velvet, the glimmer of old, dim, picturesque mirrors, the subdued yet brilliant colour in the bits of tapestry, all moved her to admiration. At Sunninghill they had, as became a lady's house, many pretty things, but with as little idea of art as it is possible in the present day to succeed in having. Miss Cherry knew nothing of art; and it had been invented, Miss Charity thought, since her days, which was the time when people liked to have respectable solid furniture, and did not understand æsthetics. The graceful balance and harmony of this new old house gave Cara a new sensation of admiring pleasure—and yet she did not like it. It would be hard to tell what was the cause of the painful impression which prejudiced her mind—yet there it was. Her own mother—her dead mother—that visionary figure, half nurse, half goddess, which gives a quite visionary support and consolation to some motherless children, did not exist for Cara. She remembered how she had been sent off to the Hill when they went away to

enjoy themselves, and how she had been sent off to the nursery when they sat talking to each other. It had been a happy home, and she had been petted and made much of by times—but this was what she recollected most clearly. And then there rose up before her, intensified by distance, that scene in her mother's room, which she had never confided to any one. She resented this mystery that was in the past, which returned and wrapped her in a kind of mist when she came back. Why had not her parents been straightforward people, with no mysteries such, as Cara said to herself, she hated? Why was there a skeleton in the cupboard? All the things she had read in books about this had made Cara angry, and it vexed her to the heart to feel and know that there was one in her home. She had buried the secret so completely in her own bosom that it had made an aching spot all round it where it lay: like that bit of a garden which lies under a noxious shadow—like that bit of a field where a fire has been—was this place in her heart where her secret lay. She felt it, in all its force, when she came home. At the Hill there were no secrets; they lived with

their windows open and their hearts, fearing no sudden appearance, no discovery. But here it seemed that the old trouble had been waiting all these years, till the girl went back who alone knew all about it, the father's past and the mother's past; and even the atmosphere of the long-shut-up house felt pernicious. Cara did not like to look round her as it came to be dark, lest she see *some one* sitting in the corner in the shadow. It seemed to her more than once that somebody moved in the distance, going out or coming in, with a sweep of a long skirt, just disappearing as she looked up. This meant, I suppose (or at least so many people would say), that her digestion was not in such good order as it should have been—but digestion was not a thing which came within Cara's range of thought.

Her father arrived about half-past six by the Continental train. Cara stood at the door of the drawing-room, with her heart beating, wondering if she ought to run down and receive him, or if he would come to her. She heard him ask if she had come, and then he added, 'I will go to my room at once, John. I suppose dinner is nearly ready. I did not

expect to have been so late. Bring my things to my room.'

'Shall I call Miss Cara, sir?'

'No; never mind. I shall see her at dinner,' he said.

And Cara instinctively closed the drawing-room door at which she had been standing, as she heard him begin to come up the stairs. She stood there, with her heart beating, in case he should call her; but he did not. Then she too went to dress, with a chilled and stifled sensation, the first sense of repulse which she had ever experienced. When she was ready, she went back again very quickly and noiselessly, leaving the door open. By-and-by her father's step became audible coming down, and he paused when he got to the door; but then resumed and went on again, sending her word that she would find him in the dining-room. It was unreasonable, the high swelling of offence and injured pride that she felt in her heart—but there it was. Was this how he meant to use her—her, his only child—now the mistress of his house? She went down, after an interval of proud and painful reluctance, a slim, girlish creature, in her white dress, her blue

eyes somewhat strained and large, more widely opened than was consistent with perfect composure. She was not beautiful, like her mother. A certain visionary youthful severity was in her looks. She was different altogether, different in every way, from the pet and darling of the ladies at the Hill. Her father had not seen her since she had leaped into long dresses and young-womanhood, and he was startled by the change. Involuntarily, as he looked at her, her mother's description of the child Cara came back to his mind. Perhaps he was all the more quick to notice this that his eye had been caught as he paused at the drawing-room door by the last purchase he had made in bric-a-brac, the Buen Retiro cup, of which his wife had said playfully that Cara would insist that he should tell the dealer the exact value before he bought it. This strange idea brought a half smile to his face, and yet his memories were so far from smiling. The cup had been broken to bits in the careless packing of that last journey home, when bric-a-brac had lost all interest in the gathering mists of suffering and despondency—and then afterwards, in an interval of apparent improvement, had been

carefully put together and placed on a shelf, high up, where its imperfections were not visible. It was the sight of it which had kept Beresford from going into the room. He would have made the effort for Cara's sake, he thought, but that this relic, so connected with the last chapter of all, had thrust that recollection upon him. He had never entered poor Annie's drawing-room since the week she died.

'Well, Cara, my dear, I am glad to see you,' he said, putting his arm round his daughter, and kissing her. 'You must forgive me for not coming upstairs. How you have grown!—or rather, you have become a young lady all at once. I don't know that you are much taller.'

'No; I have not grown,' said Cara. 'I suppose the long dress makes a difference. It is that, perhaps.'

'Yes,' he said. 'Sit down, my dear; dinner waits. I have had a long journey, and I want something. I never eat much when I am travelling. I came by Dieppe, which is a route I detest. Ah, I forgot! You have never been across the Channel yet, Cara.'

'No.'

They both recollected why—and that 'the

next expedition' after those long honeymooning travels was to have been accompanied by 'the child.' Cara remembered this with a certain bitterness; her father merely with melancholy sentiment.

'Ah!' he said, vaguely, 'we must mend that—some day. And how are the aunts? I can fancy that my sister looks just as she always did. She and I are at the age when people change little. But Aunt Charity? she is getting quite an old woman now—over seventy Have you been dull in the country, Cara? or have they petted you so much that you will feel it dull to be here?'

He looked at her with a smile which lit up his face, and touched her heart just a little; but the question touched something else than her heart—her pride and sense of importance.

'I was not dull,' she said. 'One is not dull when one has something to do—and is with those whom one loves.'

'Ah!' he said, looking at her with a little curiosity; 'that is a better way of putting it, certainly,' he added, with a smile.

Then there was a pause. John, behind Mr. Beresford's chair, who had been in the house

when Cara was born, and who thought he knew his master thoroughly, had much ado not to interfere, to whisper some instructions in her father's ear as to how a child like this should be dealt with, or to breathe into Cara's an entreaty that she would humour her papa. He said to his wife afterwards that to see them two sitting, pretending to eat their dinners, and never speaking, no more nor if they were wax images—or, when they did talk, talking like company—made him that he didn't know whether he was standing on his head or his heels. How many hints our servants could give us if decorum permitted their interference! John felt himself a true friend of both parties, anxious to bring them as near to each other as they ought to be; but he knew that it would have been as much as his place was worth had he ventured to say anything. So he stood regretfully, wistfully, behind backs and looked on. If he could but have caught Miss Cara's eye! but he did not, not even when, in the confusion of his feelings, he offered her mustard instead of sugar with her pudding. *Her* feelings were so confused also that she never noticed the mistake. Thus the dinner passed with

nothing but the sparest company conversation. There were but these two in the world of their immediate family, therefore they had no safe neutral ground of brothers and sisters to talk about.

'Is your room comfortable?' Mr. Beresford said, when they had got through a comfortless meal. 'If I had been here sooner, I should have refurnished it; but you must do it yourself, Cara, and please your own taste.'

'I don't think I have any taste,' she said.

'Ah, well!—perhaps it does not matter much; but the things that pleased you at ten will scarcely please you at seventeen. Seventeen are you? and *out*, I suppose? One might have been sure of that. Cherry would have no peace till she had you to go to parties with her.'

'We very rarely go to parties,' said Cara, with dignity. 'Of course at seventeen one is grown up. One does not require parties to prove *that*.'

He looked at her again, and this time laughed. 'I am afraid you are very positive and very decided,' he said. 'I don't think it is

necessary, my dear, to be so sure of everything. You must not think I am finding fault.'

Her heart swelled—what else could she think? She did not wish, however, to appear angry, which evidently was impolitic, but shifted the subject to her father's recent travels, on which there was much to be said. 'Are you going to the geographical meeting? Are they to have one expressly for you, like last year?' she said, not without a hidden meaning, of which he was conscious in spite of himself.

'You know what they said last year? Of course there was no reason for it; for I am not an explorer, and discovered nothing; but how could I help it? No; there will be no meeting this time, thank Heaven.'

And he saw that a faint little smile came upon Cara's lips. Instead of being delighted to see that her father had come to such honour, this little creature had thought it humbug. So it was—but it galled him to know that his daughter felt it to be so. Had she laughed out, and given him an account of the scene at the Hill; how Aunt Cherry had read the account out of the papers with such joy and pleasure; and Aunt Charity had wiped her spectacles

and taken the paper herself to read the record of his valiant deeds—the little family joke would have drawn them together, even if it had been half at his expense. But no man likes to feel that his claims to honour are judged coolly by his immediate belongings, and the little remark wounded him. This, he said to himself, was not the sort of sweet girl who would make the house once more a home to him. He let her go upstairs without saying anything of his further intentions for the evening. And Cara felt that she had been unsuccessful in the key-note she had struck; though without blaming herself seriously, for, after all, it was he and not she who ought to have struck this key-note. She went upstairs in a little flutter of dissatisfaction with herself and him. But, as soon as she had got upstairs, Cara, with true feminine instinct, began to make little overtures of reconciliation. She went round the room to see what could be done to make it more homelike. She lighted the candles on the mantelpiece, and placed some books uppermost on the table, about which she could talk to him. She was not fond of work in her own person, but she had read in good story-books that needlework was

one of the accessories to an ideal scene of domesticity—therefore, she hunted up a piece of work and an oft-mislaid case with thimble and scissors, and placed them ready on a little table. Then she called John, softly, as he went upstairs, to ask him if her father took tea, or rather, when he took tea, the possibility of leaving out that ceremonial altogether not having occurred to her.

'If you please, miss,' said John, with a deprecating air, 'master has had his cup of coffee, and he's gone out. I think he ain't gone no further than next door; and I'll make bold to say as he'll be back—soon,' said John.

Cara went back to her chair, without a word; her heart beat high—her face grew crimson in spite of herself. She retreated to her seat and took up a book, and began to read at a furious pace. She did not very well know what it was about; but she had read a long chapter before John, going downstairs and then coming up again in a middle-aged, respectable butler's leisurely way, could place the little tea-tray on the table near her. There was but one cup. It was evident that she was expected to take this refreshment alone. She gave a

little good-humoured nod at the man as he looked round, with the comprehensive glance of his class, to see if anything wanted removal—and went on reading. The book was about unconscious cerebration, and other not highly intelligible things. Some of the phrases in it got entangled, like the straws and floating rubbish on a stream, with the touch of wild commotion in her mind, and so lived in her after this mood and a great many others had passed away. She went on reading till she had heard John go down, and reach his own regions at the bottom of the stairs. Then she put the book down, and looked up, as if to meet the look of some one else who would understand her. Poor child! and there was no one there.

This was Cara's first night in the Square.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. MEREDITH.

It was Mrs. Meredith who lived next door—an old friend, who was the only person Mrs. Beresford had permitted to come and see her when she returned ill, and of whom Miss Cherry had felt with confidence that Cara would find a friend in her. She had lived there almost ever since Cara was born, with her two sons, boys a little older than Cara; a pretty gentle woman, 'not clever,' her friends said—'silly,' according to some critics, of whom poor Annie Beresford had been one—but very popular everywhere and pleasant; a woman whom most people were glad to know. It would be hard to say exactly in what her charm lay. There were handsomer women than she to be met with by the score who were much less beloved—and as for her mind, it scarcely counted at all in the estimate of her merits. But she was kind, sym-

pathetic, sweet-mannered—affectionate and caressing when it was becoming to be so—smiling and friendly everywhere. Great talkers liked her, for she would listen to them as if she enjoyed it; and silent people liked her, for she did not look bored by their side, but would make a little play of little phrases, till they felt themselves actually amusing. She had very sweet liquid brown eyes—not too bright or penetrating, but sympathetic always—and a soft, pretty white hand. She was not young, nor did she look younger than she was; but her sympathies flowed so readily, and her looks were so friendly, that she belonged to the younger part of the world always by natural right. Her boys were her chief thought and occupation. One of them was six, one four years older than Cara; so that Oswald was three-and-twenty and Edward on the eve of his majority when the girl arrived at her father's house. Mrs. Meredith's perpetual occupation with these boys, her happiness in their holiday times, her melancholy when they went to school, had kept her friends interested for a number of years. Men who breathed sighs of relief when the terrible period of the holidays came to an end, and their own

schoolboys were got rid of, put on soft looks of pity when they heard that Oswald and Edward were gone too; and mothers who were themselves too thankful that no drownings or shootings, not even a broken collar-bone or a sprained ankle, had marked the blissful vacations in their own house, half cried with Mrs. Meredith over the silence of hers 'when the boys were away.' They came and carried her off to family dinners, and made little parties to keep her from feeling it; as if there had been no boys in the world but those two. 'For you know her circumstances are so peculiar,' her friends said. The peculiarity of her circumstances consisted in this, that, though she had lived alone for these fifteen years in the Square, she was not a widow—neither was she a separated or in any way blameable wife. All that could be said was that the circumstances were very peculiar. She who was so sweet, whom everybody liked, did not somehow 'get on' with her husband. "Abody likes me but my man,' said a Scotch fisherwoman in a similar position. Mrs. Meredith did not commit herself even to so terse a description. She said nothing at all about it. Mr. Meredith was in India—though whether he had always been there, or had judiciously retired to

that wide place, in consequence of his inability to get on with the most universally-liked of women, it was not generally known. But there he was. He had been known to come home twice within the fifteen years, and had paid a visit at the Square among other visits he had paid—and his wife's friends had found no particular objections to him. But he had gone back again, and she had remained, placidly living her independent life. She was well off. Her boys were at Harrow first, and then at the University, where Edward still was disporting himself; though he had just got through his examination for the Indian Civil Service, and had more practical work in prospect. Oswald, who had ended his career at Oxford, was living at home; but even the grown-up son in the house had not removed any of her popularity. She had a perpetual levée every afternoon. Not a morning passed that two or three ladies did not rush in, in the sacred hours before luncheon, when nobody is out, to tell her or ask her about something; and the husbands would drop in on their way from business, from their offices or clubs, just for ten minutes before they went home. This was how her life was spent—and though sometimes she would speak of that life

despondently, as one passed under a perpetual shadow, yet, in fact, it was a very pleasant, entertaining, genial life. To be sure, had she been passionately attached to the absent Mr. Meredith, she might have found drawbacks in it; but, according to appearances, this was scarcely the case, and perhaps never had been.

This lady was the first visitor Cara had in the Square. She came in next morning, about twelve o'clock, when the girl was languidly wondering what was to become of her. Cara had not spent a cheerful morning. Her father had come to breakfast, and had talked to her a little about ordinary matters, and things that were in the newspaper. He was as much puzzled as a man could be what to do with this seventeen-year-old girl whom he had sent for, as a matter of course, when he himself came home to settle, but whom now he found likely to be an interruption to all his habits. He did not know Cara, and was somehow uneasy in her presence, feeling in her a suspicion and distrust of himself which he could by no means account for. And Cara did not know him, except that she did distrust and suspect him, yet expected something from him, she could not tell what;

something better than the talk about collisions and shipwrecks in the papers. She tried to respond, and the breakfast was not a sullen or silent meal. But what a contrast it was from the bright table at the Hill, with the windows open to the lawn, and all the spontaneous happy talk, which was not made up for any one, but flowed naturally, like the air they breathed! Mr. Beresford was much more accomplished than Aunt Cherry; a clever man, instead of the mild old maiden whom everybody smiled at, but—— All this went through Cara's mind as she poured out his coffee, and listened to his account of the new steamboat. There was a perfect ferment of thought going on in her brain while she sat opposite to him, saying yes and no, and now and then asking a question, by way of showing a little interest. She was asking herself how things would have been if her mother had lived; how they would have talked then: whether they would have admitted her to any share in the talk, or kept her outside, as they had done when she was a child? All these questions were jostling each other in her mind, and misty scenes rising before her, one confusing and mixing up with the other; the

same breakfast-table, as she remembered it of old, when the father and mother in their talk would sometimes not hear her questions, and sometimes say, 'Don't tease, child,' and sometimes bid her run away to the nursery; and as it might have been with her mother still sitting by, and herself a silent third person. Mr. Beresford had not a notion what the thoughts were which were going on under Cara's pretty hair, so smoothly wound about her head, and shining in the autumn sunshine, and under the pretty dark blue morning dress which 'threw up,' as Cherry meant it to do, the girl's whiteness and brightness. She could make *him* out to some degree, only putting more meaning in him than he was himself at all aware of; but he could not make out her. Did thought dwell at all in such well-shaped little heads, under hair so carefully coiled and twisted? He did not know, and could no more divine her than if she had been the Sphinx in person; but Cara, if she went wrong, did so by putting too much meaning into him.

When breakfast was over, he rose up, still holding his paper in his hand. 'I am afraid you will feel the want of your usual occupa-

tions,' he said. 'Lessons are over for you, I suppose? It is very early to give up education. Are you reading anything? You must let me know what you have been doing, and if I can help you.'

How helpless he looked standing there, inspecting her! but he did not look so helpless as he felt. How was he, a man who had never done any of life's ordinary duties, to take the supervision of a girl into his hands? If she had been a boy, he might have set her down by his side (the confusion of pronouns is inevitable) to work at Greek—a Greek play, for instance, which is always useful; but he supposed music and needlework would be what she was thinking of. No; if she had been a boy, he would have done better than take her to his study and set her down to a Greek play; he could have sent her to the University, like Edward Meredith, like every properly educated young man. But a girl of seventeen, he had always understood, was of an age to take the control of her father's house—was 'out'—a being to be taken into society, to sit at the head of his table (though rather young); and the idea that she might require occupation or instruction between the

moments of discharging these necessary duties had not occurred to him. It did now, however, quite suddenly. What was she going to do? When he went into his library, she would go to the drawing-room. Would she take her needlework? would she go to the long disused piano? What would the young strange female creature do?

'Thank you, papa,' said Cara; which was of all others the most bewildering reply she could have given him. He gazed at her again, and then went away in his utter helplessness.

'You will find me in the library, if you want me,' he said aloud. But in himself he said, with more confidence, 'Mrs. Meredith will know;' or rather, perhaps, if the truth must be said, he thought, '*She* will know. She will see at once what ought to be done. She will tell me all about it to-night!' And with this consolation he went into his library and betook himself to his important morning's work. He had to verify a quotation, which he thought had been wrongly used in his friend Mr. Fortis' book about Africa. He had to write to one or two Fellows of his pet Society, about a series of lectures on an interesting point of comparative

science, which he thought the great authority on the subject might be persuaded to give. He had to write to Mr. Sienna Brown about a Titian which had been repainted and very much injured, and about which he had been asked to give his opinion by the noble proprietor, whom he had met on his return home. It will be perceived that it would have been a serious disadvantage to public interests had Mr. Beresford been required to withdraw his thoughts from such important matters, and occupy them with the education of an unremarkable girl.

And Cara went upstairs. She had already seen cook, who had kindly told her what she thought would be 'very nice' for dinner, and had agreed humbly; but had not, perhaps, been quite so humble when cook entreated 'Miss Cara, dear,' with the confidence of an old servant, not to be frightened, and assured her that she'd soon get to know her papa's ways.

When she got to the drawing-room, she went first to the windows and looked out, and thought that a few more plants in the balcony would be an advantage, and recollected how she used to play in the Square, and gave a side-long glance at the railings of next door, won-

dering whether 'the boys' were at home, and if they had changed. Then she came in, and went to the fire, and looked at herself and the big silent room behind her in the great mirror over the mantelpiece. Cara was not vain—it was not to see how she looked that she gazed wistfully into that reflection of the room in which she was standing, so rich and full with all its pictures, its china, its tapestries and decorations confronting her like a picture, with one lonely little girl in it, in a dark blue dress and white collar, and big, sad, strained blue eyes. What a forlorn little thing that girl seemed! nobody to interchange looks with even, except herself in the glass; and the room so crowded with still life, so destitute of everything else: so rich, so warm, so beautiful, so poor, so destitute, so lonely! What was she to do with herself for the long, solitary day? She could not go out, unless she went with nurse, as she used to do when she was a child. She was an open-air girl, loving freedom, and had been used to roam about as she pleased in the sweet woods about the Hill. You may imagine how lost the poor child felt herself in those stony regions round the Square.

And it was just then that Mrs. Meredith arrived. She came in, rustling in her pretty rich silk gown, which was dark blue too, like Cara's. She came and took the girl into her kind arms and kissed her. 'If I had known when you were coming yesterday, I should have been here to receive you,' she said; 'my poor, dear child, coming back all by yourself! Why did not Aunt Cherry come with you, to get you a little used to it before you were left alone?'

'We thought it was best,' said Cara, feeling all at once that she had brought the greatest part of her troubles on herself. 'We thought papa would like it best.'

'Now, my dear,' said Mrs. Meredith, giving her a kiss, and then shaking a pretty finger at her, 'you must not begin by making a bugbear of papa. What he wishes is that you should be happy. Don't look sad, my darling. Ah, yes, I know it is a trial coming back here! It is a trial to me even,' said Mrs. Meredith, looking round and drying her soft eyes, 'to come into your poor mamma's room, and see everything as she left it; and think what a trial it must be to *him*, Cara?'

'He has never been here,' said the girl, half melted, half resisting.

'Poor soul!' said Mrs. Meredith. 'Poor man! Oh, Cara! if it be hard for you, think what it is for him! You are only a child, and you have all your life before you, you dear young happy thing.'

'I am not so very happy.'

'For the moment, my darling; but wait a little, wait,' said the kind woman, her eyes lighting up—'till the boys come home. There, you see what a foolish woman I am, Cara. I think everything mends when the boys come home. I ought to say when Edward comes home, to be sure, for I have Oswald with me now. But Edward always was your friend; don't you remember? Oswald was older; but it makes a great difference somehow when they are men. A man and a boy are two different things; and it is the boy that I like the best. But I have been so calculating upon you, my dear. You must run in half-a-dozen times a day. You must send for me whenever you want me. You must walk with me when I go out. I have no daughter, Cara, and you have no mother. Come, darling, shall it be a bargain?'

The tears were in this sweet woman's eyes, whom everybody loved. Perhaps she did not mean every word she said—who does? but there was a general truth of feeling in it all, that kept her right. Cara ran straight into her arms, and cried upon her shoulder. Perhaps because she was frightened and distrustful in other particulars of her life, she was utterly believing here. Here was the ideal for which she had looked—a friend, who yet should be something more than a friend; more tender than Cara could remember her mother to have been, yet something like what an ideal mother, a mother of the imagination, would be. Sweet looks, still beautiful, the girl thought in the enthusiasm of her age, yet something subdued and mild with experience—an authority, a knowledge, a power which no contemporary could have. Cara abandoned herself in utter and total forgetfulness of all prejudices, resistances, and doubts, to this new influence. Her mother's friend, the boys' mother, who had been her own playmates, and about whom she was so curious, without knowing it—her nearest neighbour, her natural succour, a daughterless woman, while she was a motherless girl. Happiness seemed

to come back to her with a leap. 'I shall not mind if I may always come to you, and ask you about everything,' she said.

'And *of course* you must do that. Did not Cherry tell you so? I thought Cherry would have been faithful to me. Ah! she did? then I am happy, dear; for if I have one weakness more than another it is that my friends should not give me up. But Cherry should have come with you,' said Mrs. Meredith, shaking her head.

'It was all for papa——'

'But that is what I find fault with—papa's only daughter, only child, thinking for a moment that her happiness was not what he wanted most.'

Cara drooped her guilty head. She was guilty; yes, she did not deny it; but probably this goddess-woman, this ideal aid and succour, did not know how little in the happier days had been thought of Cara. *She* had always thought of 'the boys' first of all; but then Mr. Meredith—Cara had an odd sort of recollection somehow that Mr. Meredith was not first, and that perhaps this might account for the other differences. So she did not say anything, but

sat down on a stool at her new-old friend's feet, and felt that the strange, rich, beautiful room had become home.

'Now I never could do anything like this,' said Mrs. Meredith, looking round. 'I am fond of china too; but I never know what is good and what is bad; and sometimes I see your papa take down a bit which I think beautiful, and look at it with such a face. How is one to know,' she said, laughing merrily, 'if one is not clever? I got the book with all the marks in it, but, my dear child, I never recollect one of them; and then such quantities of pretty china are never marked at all. Ah, I can understand why he doesn't come here! I think I would make little changes, Cara. Take down that, for instance'—and she pointed at random to the range of velvet-covered shelves, on the apex of which stood the Buen Retiro cup—'and put a picture in its place. Confuse him by a few changes. Now stop: is he in? I think we might do it at once, and then we could have him up.'

Cara shrank perceptibly. She drew herself a little away from the stranger's side. 'You are frightened,' cried Mrs. Meredith, with a soft

laugh. 'Now, Cara, Cara, this is exactly what I tell you must not be. You don't know how good and gentle he is. I can talk to him of anything—even my servants, if I am in trouble with them; and every woman in London, who is not an angel, is in trouble with her servants from time to time. Last time my cook left me—— Why, there is nothing,' said Mrs. Meredith, reflectively, 'of which I could not talk to your papa. He is kindness itself.'

This was meant to be very reassuring, but somehow it did not please Cara. A half resentment (not so distinct as that) came into her mind that her father, who surely belonged to her, rather than to any other person on the face of the earth, should be thus explained to her and recommended. The feeling was natural, but painful, and somewhat absurd, for there could be no doubt that she did not know him, and apparently Mrs. Meredith did; and what she said was wise; only somehow it jarred upon Cara, who was sensitive all over, and felt every touch, now here, now there.

'Well, my dear, never mind, if you don't like it, for to-day; but the longer it is put off the more difficult it will be. Whatever is to be

done ought to be done at once I always think. He should not have taken a panic about this room; why should he? Poor dear Annie! everything she loved ought to be dear to him; that would be my feeling. And Cara, dear, you might do a great deal; you might remove this superstition for ever, for I do think it is superstition. However, if you wish me to say no more about it, I will hold my tongue. And now what shall we do to-day? Shall we go out after luncheon? As soon as you have given your papa his lunch, you shall put on your things, and I will call for you. My people never begin to come before four; and you shall come in with me and see them. That will amuse you, for there are all sorts of people. And your papa and you are going to dine with us; I told him last night you must come. You will see Oswald and renew your acquaintance with him, and we can talk. Oswald is very good-looking, Cara. Do you remember him? he has dark hair now and dark eyes; but I wish he had always remained a boy; though of course that is not possible,' she said, shaking her head with a sigh. 'Now I must run away, and get through my morning's work. No, don't disturb your

papa; evening is his time. I shall see him in the evening. But be sure you are ready to go out at half-past two.'

How little time there seemed to be for moping or thinking after this visit! Cara made a rapid survey of the drawing-room when she returned to it, to see what changes could be made, as her friend suggested. She would not have had the courage to do any such thing, had it not been suggested to her. It was her father's room, not hers; and what right had she to meddle? But somewhat a different light seemed to have entered with her visitor. Cara saw, too, when she examined, that changes could be made which would make everything different, yet leave everything fundamentally the same. Her heart fluttered a little at the thought of such daring. She might have taken such a thing upon her at the Hill, without thinking whether or not she had a right to do it; but then she never could have had time to move anything without Miss Charity or Miss Cherry coming in, in the constant cheery intercourse of the house. But for these changes she would have abundant time; no one would come to inspect while her rearrangements were going

on. However, there was no time to think of them now; the day was busy and full. She came downstairs for luncheon with her bonnet on, that she might not be too late. 'I am going out with Mrs. Meredith,' she said to her father, in explanation of her out-of-door costume.

'Ah, that is right' he said. 'And we are to dine there this evening.' Even he looked brighter and more genial when he said this. And the languid day had grown warm and bright, full of occupations and interest; and to keep Mrs. Meredith *waiting*—to be too late—that would never do.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR.

Mrs. Meredith's drawing-room was not like the twin room next door. It was more ornate, though not nearly so beautiful. The three windows were draped in long misty white curtains, which veiled the light even at its brightest and made a curious artificial semblance of mystery and retirement on this autumn afternoon, when the red sunshine glowed outside. Long looking-glasses here and there reflected these veiled lights. There was a good deal of gilding, and florid furniture, which insisted on being looked at. Cara sat down on an ottoman close to the further window after their walk, while Mrs. Meredith went to take off her bonnet. She wanted to see the people arrive, and was a little curious about them. There were, for a country house, a good many visitors at the Hill; but they came irregularly, and sometimes it

would happen that for days together not a soul would appear. But Mrs. Meredith had no more doubt of the arrival of her friends than if they had all been invited guests. Cara was still seated alone, looking out, her pretty profile relieved against the white curtain like a delicate little cameo, when the first visitor arrived, who was a lady, and showed some annoyance to find the room already occupied. 'I thought I must be the first,' she said, giving the familiar salutation of a kiss to Mrs. Meredith as she entered. 'Never mind, it is only Cara Beresford,' said that lady, and led her friend by the hand to where two chairs were placed at the corner of the fire. Here they sat and talked in low tones with great animation, the 'he saids' and 'she saids' being almost all that reached Cara's ear, who, though a little excited by the expectation of 'company,' did not understand this odd version of it. By-and-by, however, the lady came across to her and began to talk, and Cara saw that some one else had arrived. The room filled gradually after this, two or three people coming and going, each of them in their turn receiving a few minutes' particular audience. Nothing could be more evident than that it was

to see the lady of the house that these people came; for, though the visitors generally knew each other, there was not much general conversation. Every new-comer directed his or her glance to Mrs. Meredith's corner, and, if the previous audience was not concluded, relapsed into a corner, and talked a little to the next person, whoever that might be. In this way Cara received various points of enlightenment as to this new society. Most of them had just returned to town. They talked of Switzerland, they talked of Scotland; of meeting So-and-so here and there; of this one who was going to be married, and that one who was supposed to be dying; but all this talk was subsidiary to the grand object of the visit, which was the personal interview. Cara, though she was too young to relish her own spectator position, could not help being interested by the way in which her friend received her guests. She had a different aspect for each. The present one, as Cara saw looking up, after an interval, was a man, with whom Mrs. Meredith was standing in front of the furthest window. She was looking up in his face, with her eyes full of interest, not saying much; listening with her whole mind

and power, every fold in her dress, every line of her hair and features, falling in with the sentiment of attention. Instead of talking, she assented with little nods of her head and soft acquiescent or remonstrative movements of her delicate hands, which were lightly clasped together. This was not at all her attitude with the ladies, whom she placed beside her, in one of the low chairs, with little caressing touches and smiles and low-voiced talk. How curious it was to watch them one by one! Cara felt a strong desire, too, to have something to tell; to go and make her confession or say her say upon some matter interesting enough to call forth that sympathetic, absorbed look—the soft touch upon her shoulder, or half embrace.

It was tolerably late when the visitors went away—half-past six, within an hour of dinner. The ladies were the last to go, as they had been the first to come; and Cara, relieved by the departure of the almost last stranger, drew timidly near the fire, when Mrs. Meredith called her. It was only as she approached—and the girl felt cold, sitting so far off and being so secondary, which is a thing that makes everybody chilly—that she perceived somebody remaining, a gen-

tleman seated in an easy-chair—an old gentleman (according to Cara; he was not of that opinion himself), who had kept his place calmly for a long time without budging, whosoever went or came.

'Well, you have got through the heavy work,' said this patient visitor, 'and I hope you have sent them off happier. It has not been your fault, I am sure, if they are not happier; they have each had their audience and their appropriate word.'

'You always laugh at me, Mr. Somerville: why should I not say what I think they will like best to the people who come to see me?'

'Ah, when you put it like that!' he said; 'certainly, why shouldn't you? But I think some of those good people thought that you gave them beautiful advice and consolation, didn't you? I thought it seemed like that as I looked on.'

'You are always so severe. Come, my darling, you are out of sight there; come and smooth down this mentor of mine by the sight of your young face. This is my neighbour's child, Miss Beresford, from next door.'

'Ah, *the* neighbour!' said Mr. Somerville,

with a slight emphasis, and then he got up somewhat stiffly and made Cara his bow. 'Does not he come for his daily bread like the rest?' he said, in an undertone.

'Mr. Beresford is going to dine with me to-night, with Cara, who has just come home,' said Mrs. Meredith, with a slight shade of embarrassment on her face.

'Ah! from school?' said this disagreeable old man.

It had grown dark, and the lady herself had lighted the candles on the mantelpiece. He was sitting immediately under a little group of lights in a florid branched candlestick, which threw a glow upon his baldness. Cara, unfavourably disposed, thought there was a sneer instead of a smile upon his face, which was partially in shade.

'I have never been to school,' said the girl, unreasonably angry at the imputation; and just then some one else came in—another gentleman, with whom Mrs. Meredith, who had advanced to meet him, lingered near the door. Mr. Somerville watched over Cara's head, and certainly his smile had more amusement than benevolence in it.

'Ah!' he said again; 'then you miss the delight of feeling free: no girl who has not been at school can understand the pleasure of not being at school any longer. Where have you been, then, while your father has been away?'

'With my aunts, at Sunninghill,' said Cara, unnecessarily communicative, as is the habit of youth.

'Ah, yes, with your aunts! I used to know some of your family. Look at her now,' said the critic, more to himself than to Cara—'this is a new phase. This one she is smoothing down.'

Cara could not help a furtive glance. The new comer had said something, she could not hear what, and stood half-defiant at the door. Mrs. Meredith's smile spoke volumes. She held out her hand with a deprecating, conciliatory look. They could not hear what she said; but the low tone, the soft aspect, the extended hand, were full of meaning. The old gentleman burst into a broken, hoarse laugh. It was because the new-comer, melting all at once, took the lady's hand and bowed low over it, as if performing an act of homage. Mr. Somerville laughed, but the stranger did not hear.

'This is a great deal too instructive for you,' he said. 'Come and tell me about your aunts. You think me quite an old man, eh? and I think you quite a little girl.'

'I am not so young! I am seventeen.'

'Well! And I am seven-and-fifty—not old at all—a spruce and spry bachelor, quite ready to make love to any one; but such are the erroneous ideas we entertain of each other. Have you known Mrs. Meredith a long time? or is this your first acquaintance?'

'Oh, a very long time—almost since ever I was born!'

'And I have known her nearly twenty years longer than that. Are you very fond of her? Yes, most people are. So is your father, I suppose, like the rest. But now you are the mistress of the house, eh? you should not let your natural-born subjects stray out of your kingdom o' nights.'

'I have not any kingdom,' said Cara, mournfully. 'The house is so sad. I should like to change it if papa would consent.'

'That would be very good,' said the volunteer counsellor, with alacrity. 'You could not do anything better, and I dare say he will do it

if you say so. A man has a great deal of tenderness for his wife's only child when he has lost her. You have your own love and the other too.'

'Have I?' said the girl, wistfully. Then she remembered that to talk of her private affairs and household circumstances with a stranger was a wonderful dereliction of duty. She made herself quite stiff accordingly in obedience to propriety, and changed her tone.

'Is not Oswald at home?' she said. 'I thought I should be sure to see him.'

'Oswald is at home, but he keeps away at this hour. He overdoes it, I think; but sons like to have their mothers to themselves; I don't think they like her to have such troops of friends. And Oswald, you know, is a man, and would like to be master.'

'He has no right to be master!' said Cara, the colour rising on her cheeks. 'Why should not she have her friends?'

'That is exactly what I tell him; but most likely he will understand you better. He is not my ideal of a young man; so you have no call to be angry with me on account of Oswald.'

'I—angry with—you; when I don't know

you—when I never saw you before! I beg your pardon,' cried Cara, fearing that perhaps this might sound rude; but if it was rude it was true.

'Must you go?' said Mrs. Meredith to her visitor. 'Well, I will not delay you, for it is late; but that is all over, is it not? I cannot afford to be misunderstood by any one I care for. Won't you say "How d'ye do?" to Mr. Somerville, my old friend, whom you see always, and Miss Beresford, my young friend, whom you have never seen before?'

'I have not time, indeed,' said the stranger, with a vague bow towards the fireplace; 'but I go away happy—it is all over, indeed. I shall know better than ever to listen to detractors and mischief-makers again.'

'That is right,' she said, giving him her hand once more. When he was gone she turned back with a little air of fatigue. 'Somebody had persuaded that foolish boy that I thought him a bore. He is not a bore—except now and then; but he is too young,' said Mrs. Meredith, shaking her head. 'You young people are so exigent, Cara. You want always to be first; and in friendship that, you know, is impossible. All are equal on that ground.'

'I am glad you have a lesson now and then,' said Mr. Somerville. 'You know my opinion on that subject.'

'Are you going to dine with us, dear Mr. Somerville?' said Mrs. Meredith, sweetly, looking at her watch. 'Do. You know Mr. Beresford is coming, who is very fine company indeed. No? I am so sorry. It would be so much more amusing for him, not to speak of Cara and me.'

'I am very sorry I can't amuse you to-night,' he said, getting to his feet more briskly than Cara expected. Mrs. Meredith, laughed; and there was a certain sound of hostility in the laugh, as though she was glad of the little prick she had bestowed.

'Cara, you must run and dress,' she said; 'not any toilette to speak of, dear. There will only be your father and Oswald; but you must be quick, for we have been kept very late this evening. I wonder you can resist that young face,' she said, as Cara went away. 'You are fond of youth, I know.'

'I am not fond of affording amusement,' he said. He limped slightly as he walked, which was the reason he had allowed Cara to go be-

fore him. 'Yes; I like youth. Generally it makes few phrases, and it knows what it means.'

'Which is just what I dislike.'

'Yes; elderly sirens naturally do. But next time Beresford comes to dine, and you ask me, if you will give me a little longer notice I will come, for I want to meet him.'

'Let it be on Saturday, then,' she said; 'that is, if he has no engagement. I will let you know.'

'As if she did not know what engagements he had!' Mr. Somerville said to himself: 'as if he ever dreamt of going anywhere that would interfere with his visits here!' He struck his stick sharply against the stairs as he went down. He had no sense of hostility to Mrs. Meredith, but rather that kind of uneasy liking akin to repugnance, which made him wish to annoy her. He felt sure she was made angry by the sound of his stick on the stairs. Her household went upon velvet, and made no noise; for though she was not fanciful she had nerves, and was made to start and jump by any sudden noise.

Cara heard him go with his stick along the Square, as nurse, who was her maid, closed the

windows of her room. The sound got less distinct after this, but still she could hear it gradually disappearing. What a disagreeable old man he was, though he said he did not think himself old; at seven-and-fifty! Cara thought seven-and-twenty oldish, and seven-and-thirty the age of a grandfather; and yet he did not think himself old! So strange are the delusions which impartial people have to encounter in this world. Nurse interrupted her thoughts by a question about her dress. One of her very prettiest evening dresses lay opened out upon her bed.

'That is too fine,' said Cara; 'we are to be quite alone.'

'You haven't seen Mr. Oswald, have you, Miss Cara, dear? He has grown up that handsome you would not know him. He was always a fine boy; but now—I don't know as I've ever seen a nicer-looking young man.'

'I will have my plain white frock, please, nurse—the one I wore last night,' said Cara, absolutely unaware of any connection that could exist between Oswald Meredith's good looks and her second-best evening dress—a dress that might do for a small dance, as Aunt

Cherry had impressed upon her. It never occurred to the girl that her own simple beauty could be heightened by this frock or that. Vanity comes on early or late, according to the character; but, except under very favourable (or unfavourable) circumstances, seldom develops in early youth. Cara had not even begun to think whether she herself was pretty or not, and she would have scorned with hot shame and contempt the idea of dressing for effect. People only think of dress when they have self-consciousness. She did not understand enough of the a, b, c of that sentiment to put any meaning to what nurse said, and insisted upon her plain muslin gown, laughing at the earnestness of the attendant. 'It is too fine,' she said. 'Indeed I am not obstinate: it would be a great deal too fine.' Her father was waiting for her in the hall when the simple toilette was completed, and Mrs. Meredith had not yet made her appearance when the two went into the drawing-room next door. Mr. Beresford sat down with his eyes turned towards the door. 'She is almost always late,' he said, with a smile. He was a different man here—indulgent, gentle, fatherly. Mrs. Mere-

dith came in immediately after, with pretty lace about her shoulders and on her head. 'Oswald is late, as usual,' she said, putting her hand into Mr. Beresford's. He looked at her, smiling, with a satisfied friendly look, as if his eyes loved to dwell upon her. He smiled at Oswald's lateness; did not look cross, as men do when they are waiting for their dinner. 'Cara is punctual, you see,' he said, with a smile.

'Cara is a dear child,' said Mrs. Meredith. 'She has been with me all day. How odd that you should be made complete by a daughter and I by a son, such old friends as we are! Ah! here is Oswald. Would you have known him, Cara? Oswald, this is——'

'There is no need to tell me who it is,' said Oswald. Cara saw, when she looked at him, that what the others had said was true. It did not move her particularly, but still she could see that he was very handsome, as everybody had told her. He took her hand, which she held out timidly, and, without any ceremony, drew it within his arm. 'We must go to dinner at once,' he said, 'or Sims will put poison in the soup. She longs to poison me, I

know, in my soup, because I am always late; but I hope she will let me off for your sake, Cara. And so really you are little Cara? I did not believe it, but I see it is true now.'

'Why did you not believe it? I think I should have known you,' said Cara, 'if I had met you anywhere. It is quite true; but you are just like Oswald all the same.'

'What is quite true?' Oswald was a great deal more vain than Cara was, being older and having had more time to see the effect of his good looks. He laughed and did not push his question any further. It was a pleasant beginning. He had his mother's sympathetic grace of manner, and, Cara felt at once, understood her, and all her difficulties at a glance, as Mrs. Meredith had done. How far this was true may be an open question; but she was convinced of it, which for the moment was enough.

'We did not come downstairs so ceremoniously last time we met,' he said. 'When you came for the nursery tea, with nurse behind you. I think Edward held the chief place in your affections then. He was nearer your age; but thank Heaven that fellow is out of the way,

and I have a little time to make the running before he comes back!'

Cara did not know what it meant to 'make the running,' and was puzzled. She was not acquainted with any slang except that which has crept into books, but an expression of pleasure in Edward's absence appalled her. 'I remember him best,' she said, 'because he was more near my age; but you were both big boys—too big to care for a little thing like me. I remember seeing you come in with a latch-key one afternoon and open the door—ah!' said Cara, with a little cry. It had been on the afternoon of her mother's death when she had been placed at the window to look for her father's coming, and had seen the two big boys in the afternoon light, and watched them, with an interest which quite distracted her attention for the moment, fitting the key into the door.

'What is it?' he said, looking at her very kindly. 'You have not been here for a long time—yes, it must bring back so many things. Look, Cara! Sims is gracious; she will not poison me this time. She has not even frowned at me, and it is all because of you.'

'I like Sims,' said Cara, her heart rising, she could not tell why. 'I like everybody I used to know.'

'So do I—because you do; otherwise I am not so fond of my fellow-creatures; some of them plague one's life out. What are you going to do when you get used to the excitement of seeing us all again? You will find yourself very badly off for something to do.'

'Do you?' said Cara, innocently.

'My mother does for me. She thinks me very idle. So I am, I suppose. What is the good of muddling what little brains one has in work? One in a family who does that is enough. Edward is that excellent person. He goes in for Greek so that my head aches; though why he should, being intended for the Civil Service, I don't know.'

'Won't it do him any good?' said Cara, with regret. She was practical, and did not like to hear of this waste of labour. 'Is Edward—changed—like you?' she added softly, after a pause. He looked at her with laughing bright eyes, all softened and liquid with pleasure. He knew what she meant, and that his handsome face was having its natural effect upon Cara;

though, being much older than Cara, he could not have believed how little effect his good looks really had.

'I think he is very like what he always was,' he said; 'he is such a good fellow, Cara. If anyone asks you which is the best of the Merediths, say Edward. You may be sure you will be right. Listen what the elders are saying; they are talking about you and me.'

'Why about you and me?' Cara was always slightly alarmed to hear that she was being talked of. It roused the latent suspicion in her which had been startled into being at her mother's death. She stopped talking, and looked at the other two. His mother was opposite to Oswald, and her father was opposite to her. What an odd arrangement it seemed when you came to think of it! If papa had got one of the boys, and she, Cara, had fallen to the lot of Mrs. Meredith—would that have been better? She looked at Oswald's mother and wondered; then bethought herself of the Hill and blushed. No, such an idea was nothing but treachery to the Hill, where it was Cara, and no other, who was the chosen child.

'She has grown into a little lily,' said Mrs.

Meredith. 'She is shy, but open and winning, and I like girls to be shy like that. I do not wonder that you are proud of her.'

'Am I proud of her? I am not sure. She is nice-looking, I think.'

'Nice-looking! She has grown into a little lily. It is wonderful how she blends two likenesses; I see you both. Ah! have I said too much? A happy child so often does that; you will forgive me if I say anything that hurts——'

'You could not say anything that hurts,' he said in a low voice, 'it would not hurt coming from you.'

'Well, perhaps it ought not,' she said, with a smile, 'because it is said in true friendship. I noticed that at once in Cara—sometimes one and sometimes the other—like both. That is not the case with my boys. I shall not have Edward till Christmas. You know it has always been my happy time when the boys were here.'

'Is Oswald doing anything—?' A close observer would have seen that Mr. Beresford was not fond of Oswald. He was not nearly so well-disposed to him as Mrs. Meredith was to Cara. Perhaps it was purely on moral grounds

and justifiable; perhaps the young man and his senior came in each other's way more than the girl and the matron did. This abrupt question rather put a stop to poor Mrs. Meredith. She blushed a little and faltered as she replied.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE YOUNG PEOPLE.

Cara's second evening at home was passed much more happily than the first, thanks to Mrs. Meredith, and her spirits rose in consequence; but next morning there ensued a fall, as was natural, in her spiritual barometer. She went to the window in the drawing-room when she was all alone, and gazed wistfully at as much as she could see of the step and entrance of the house next door. Did they mean her to 'run in half-a-dozen times a day,' as Mrs. Meredith had said? Cara had been brought up in her aunt's old-fashioned notions, with strenuous injunctions not 'to make herself cheap,' and to cultivate 'a proper pride.' She had often been told that running into sudden intimacy was foolish, and that a girl should be rather shy than eager about overtures of ordinary friendship. All these things restrained her, and her own dispo-

sition which favoured all reserves. But she could not help going to the window and looking out wistfully. Only a wall between them! and how much more cheerful it was on the other side of that wall. Her heart beat as she saw Oswald come out, not because it was Oswald —on the whole she would have preferred his mother; but solitude ceased to be solitude when friendly figures thus appear, even outside. Oswald glanced up and saw her. He took off his hat—he paused—finally, he turned and came up the steps just underneath where she was standing. In another moment he came in, his hat in his hand, his face full of brightness of the morning. Nurse showed him in with a sort of affectionate enthusiasm. 'Here is Mr. Oswald, Miss Cara, come to see you.'

The women servants were all the slaves of the handsome young fellow. Wherever he went he had that part of the community on his side.

'I came to see that you are not the worse for your dull dinner last evening,' he said. 'It used to be etiquette to ask for one's partner at a ball; how much more after a domestic evening. Have you a headache? were you very much

bored? It is for my interest to know, that I may be able to make out whether you will come again.'

'Were *you* bored that you ask me?' said Cara. 'I was very happy.'

'And, thanks to you, *I* was very happy,' he said. 'Clearly four are better company than three. Your father and my mother have their own kind of talking. Why, I have not been in this room since I was a child; how much handsomer it is than ours! Come, Cara, tell me all about the pictures and the china. Of course you must be a little connoisseur. Should one say connoisseuse? I never know. *Virtuosa*, that is a prettier word, and we are all in the way of the cardinal virtues here.'

'But I am not at all a *virtuosa*. I don't know. I was a child, too, when I used to be at home, and I suppose it hurts papa to come into this room. He has never been here since I came; never at all, I think, since mamma died.'

'Does he leave you by yourself all the evening? what a shame!' said Oswald. 'Is he so full of sentiment as that? One never knows people. Come, Cara, if that is the case, it is

clear that I must spend the evenings with you.'

Cara laughed frankly at the suggestion. She did not understand what he meant by a slight emphasis upon the pronouns, which seemed to point out some balance of duties. She said, 'I have only been here for two evenings. The first was very dull. I had nothing to read but that book, and I was not happy. The second was last night. Oh, I am not accustomed to much company. I can be quite happy by myself, when I am used to things.'

'That means you don't want me,' said Oswald; 'but I shall come all the same. What is the book about? You don't mean to say you understand that! What is unconscious cerebration, Cara? Good heavens! how rash I have been. Are you an F.R.S. already, like the rest of your father's friends?'

'I don't know what it means,' said Cara, 'no more than I know about the china. But I read a chapter that first night; it was always something. You see there are very few books in this room. They have been taken away, I suppose. Nobody, except mamma, has ever lived here.'

She gave a little shiver as she spoke, and

looked wistfully round. Even in the morning, with the sunshine coming in, how still it was! Oswald thought he would like to break the china, and make a human noise, over the head of the father who was sitting below, making believe to think so much of the memory of his dead wife, and neglecting his living child. The young man had a grudge against the elder one, which gave an edge to his indignation.

'You shall have books,' he said, 'and company too, if you will have me, Cara: that will bring them to their senses,' he added to himself in a half-laughing, half-angry undertone.

What did he mean? Cara had no idea. She laughed too, with a little colour starting to her face, wondering what Aunt Charity would think if she knew that Oswald meant to spend his evenings with her. Cara herself did not see any harm in it, though she felt it was a joke, and could not be.

'You were going out,' she said, 'when you saw me at the window. Had you anything to do? for if you had you must not stay and waste your time with me.'

'Why should I have anything to do?'

'I thought young men had,' said Cara. 'Of

course I don't know very much about them. I know only the Burchells *well;* they are never allowed to come and talk in the morning. If it is Reginald, he always says he ought to be reading; and Roger, he is of course at work, you know.'

'I don't know in the least,' said Oswald; 'but I should like to learn. What does this revelation of Rogers and Reginalds mean? I never supposed there were any such persons. I thought that Edward and myself were about the limit of friendship allowed to little Cara, and here is a clan, a tribe. I forewarn you at once that I put myself in opposition to your Reginalds and Rogers. I dislike the gentlemen. I am glad to hear that they have no time to talk in the mornings. I, for my part, have plenty of time.'

'Oh, you are not likely to know them' said, Cara, laughing, 'unless, indeed, Roger comes on Sundays, as he said. They are probably not so rich as you are. Their father is a clergyman, and they have to work. I should like that myself better than doing nothing.'

'That means,' said Oswald, with great show of savagery, setting his teeth, 'that you prefer

the said Roger, who must not talk o'mornings, to me, presumably not required to work? Know, then, young lady, that I have as much need to work as your Roger; more, for I mean to be somebody. If I go in for the bar it is with the intention of being Lord Chancellor; and that wants work—work! such as would take the very breath away from your clergyman's sons, who probably intend to be mere clergymen, and drop into a fat living.'

'Roger is an engineer,' said Cara; 'he is at the College; he walks about with chains, measuring. I don't know what is the good of it, but I suppose it is of some good. There are so many things,' she added, with a sigh, 'that one is obliged to take for granted. Some day, I suppose, he will have bridges and lighthouses to make. That one can understand—that would be worth doing.'

'I hate Roger!' said Oswald. 'I shall never believe in any lighthouses of his making; there will be a flaw in them. Do you remember the Eddystone, which came down ever so often? Roger's will tumble down. I know it. And when you have seen it topple over into the sea you

shall come and see me tranquilly seated on the woolsack, and recant all your errors.'

Upon which they both laughed—not that there was much wit in the suggestion, but they were both young, and the one lighted up the other with gay gleams of possible mirth.

'However,' said Oswald, 'that we may not throw that comparison to too remote a period, where do you think I was going? Talk of me as an idler, if you please. Does this look like idling?' He took from his pocket a little roll of paper, carefully folded, and breaking open the cover showed her a number of MS. pages, fairly copied out in graduated lines. Cara's face grew crimson with sudden excitement.

'*Poetry!*' she said; but capital letters would scarcely convey all she meant. 'Oswald, are you a poet?'

He laughed again, which jarred upon her feelings, for poetry (she felt) was not a thing to laugh at. 'I write verses,' he said; 'that is idling—most people call it so, Cara, as well as you.'

'But I would *never* call it so! Oh, Oswald, if there is anything in the world I care for——. Read me some, will you? Oh, do read me

something. There is nothing,' cried Cara, her lips trembling, her eyes expanding, her whole figure swelling with a sigh of feeling, 'nothing I care for so much. I would rather know a poet than a king!'

Upon this Oswald laughed again, and looked at her with kind admiration. His eyes glowed, but with a brotherly light. 'You are a little enthusiast,' he said. 'I called you *virtuosa*, and you are one in the old-fashioned sense, for that is wider than bric-a-brac. Yes; I sometimes think I might be a poet if I had anyone to inspire me, to keep me away from petty things. I am my mother's son, Cara. I like to please everybody, and that is not in favour of the highest pursuits. I want a Muse. What if you were born to be my Muse? You shall see some of the things that are printed,' he added; 'not these. I am more sure of them when they have attained the reality of print.'

'Then they are printed?' Cara's eyes grew bigger and bigger, her interest grew to the height of enthusiasm. 'How proud your mother must be, Oswald! I wonder she did not tell me. Does Edward write, too?'

'Edward!' cried the other with disdain; 'a

clodhopper; a plodding, steady, respectable fellow, who has passed for the Civil Service. Poetry would be more sadly in his way than it is in mine. Oh, yes, it is sadly in mine. My mother does not know much; but instead of being enthusiastic she is annoyed with what she does know. That is the kind of thing one has to meet with in this world,' he said, with a sigh over his own troubles. 'Sometimes there is one like you—one more generous, more capable of appreciating the things that do not pay—with some people the things that pay are everything. And poetry does not pay, Cara.'

'I don't like you even to say so.'

'Thanks for caring what I say; you have an eye for the ideal. I should like to be set on a pedestal, and to have something better expected from me. That is how men are made, Cara. To know that someone—a creature like yourself—expects something, thinks us capable of something. I am talking sentiment,' he said, with a laugh; 'decidedly you are the Muse I am looking for. On a good pedestal, with plenty of white muslin, there is not a Greek of them all would come up to you.'

'I don't know what you mean, Oswald. Now you are laughing at me.'

'Well, let us laugh,' he said, putting his papers into his pocket again. 'Are you coming to my mother's reception this afternoon? I hear you were there yesterday. What do you think of it? Was old Somerville there with his wig? He is the guardian angel; he comes to see that we all go on as we ought, and that no one goes too far. He does not approve of me. He writes to India about me that I will never be of much use in the world.'

'To India.'

'Yes; all the information about us goes out there. Edward gives satisfaction, but not the rest of us. It is not easy to please people so far off who have not you to judge, but only your actions set down in black and white. Well, I suppose I must go now—my actions don't tell for much: "Went into the house next door, and got a great deal of good from little Cara." That would not count, you see; not even if I put down, "Cheered up little Cara, who was mopish." Might I say that?'

'Yes, indeed; you have cheered me up very much,' said Cara, giving him her hand. Oswald stooped over her a moment, and the

girl thought he was going to kiss her, which made her retreat a step backwards, her countenance flaming, and all the shy dignity and quick wrath of her age stirred into movement. But he only laughed and squeezed her hand, and ran downstairs, his feet ringing young and light through the vacant house. Cara would have gone to the window and looked after him but for that—was it a threatening of a visionary kiss? How silly she was! Of course he did not mean anything of the kind. If he did, it was just as if she had been his sister, and Cara felt that her momentary alarm showed her own silliness, a girl that had never been used to anything. How much an only child lost by being an only child, she reflected gravely, sitting down after he left her by the fire. How pleasant it would have been to have a brother like Oswald. And if he should be a poet! But this excited Cara more when he was talking to her than after he was gone. He did not fall in with her ideas of the poet, who was a being of angelic type to her imagination, not a youth with laughter glancing from his eyes.

That evening Cara sat solitary after dinner,

the pretty silver lamp lighted, with its white moon-orb of light upon the table by her; the fire burning just bright enough for company, for it still was not cold. She had said, timidly, 'Shall you come upstairs this evening, papa?' and had received a mildly evasive answer, and she thought about nine o'clock that she heard the hall door shut, just as John came into the room with tea. She thought the man looked at her compassionately, but she would not question him. The room looked very pretty in the firelight and lamplight, with the little tray gleaming in all its brightness of china and silver, and the little white figure seated by the fire; but it was very lonely. She took up a book a little more interesting than the one which had been her first resource, but presently let it drop on her knee wondering and asking herself would Oswald come? Perhaps he had forgotten; perhaps he had noticed her shrink when he went away, and, meaning nothing by his gesture, did not know why she had retreated from him—perhaps——. But who could tell what might have stopped him? A boy was not like a girl—he might have been asked somewhere.

He might have gone to the theatre. Perhaps he had a club, and was there among his friends. All this passed through her head as she sat with the book in her hand, holding it open on her knee. Then she began to read, and forgot for the minute; then suddenly the book dropped again, and she thought, with a sort of childish longing, of what might be going on next door, just on the other side of the wall, where everything was sure to be so cheerful. If she could only pierce that unkindly wall, and see through! That made her think of Pyramus and Thisbe, and she smiled, but soon grew grave again. Was this how she was to go on living—lonely all the evening through, her father seeking society somewhere else, she could not tell where? She thought of the drawing-room at the Hill, and her eyes grew wet; how they would miss her there! and here nobody wanted Cara. Her father, perhaps, might think it right that his child should live under his roof; but that was all he cared apparently; and was it to be always thus, and never change? At seventeen it is so natural to think that everything that is, is unalterable and will never change.

Then Cara, with a gulp, and a determination to be as happy as she could in the terrible circumstances, and above all, to shun Oswald, who had not kept his word, opened her book again, and this time got into the story, which had been prefaced by various interludes of philosophising, and remembered no more till nurse came to inquire if she did not mean to go to bed to-night. So the evening did not hang so heavy on her hands as she thought.

Next day Oswald came again, and told her of a forgotten engagement which he had been obliged to keep; and they chatted gaily as before; and he brought her some poems, printed in a magazine, which sounded beautiful when he read them, to her great delight, but did not seem so beautiful when she read them over herself, as she begged she might be allowed to do. After this there was a great deal of intercourse between the two houses, and Cara's life grew brighter. Now and then, it was true, she would be left to spend an evening alone; but she got other friends, and went to some parties with Mrs. Meredith, Oswald attending them. He was always about; he came and had long

private talks with her, reading his verses and appealing to her sympathies and counsel; he walked with her when she went out with his mother; he was always by her side wherever they went. 'I know Edward will cut me out when he comes, so I must make the running now,' he said often, and Cara no longer wondered what making the running meant. She got so used to his presence that it seemed strange when he was not there.

'It's easy to see what that will end in,' said Nurse to John and Cook in the kitchen.

'I wish as one could see what the other would end in,' Cook replied. But the household watched the two young people with proud delight, going to the window to look at them when they went out, and rejoicing over the handsome couple.

'I always said as our Miss Cara was one as would settle directly,' her faithful attendant said. 'Seventeen! it's too young, that is, for anything.'

'But he haven't got a penny,' said Cook, who was more prudent, 'and he don't do nothing. I'd like a man as could work for me, if I was Miss Cara.'

'I'd like him better if he hadn't no call to work,' said Nurse, with true patrician feeling.

But the chief parties knew nothing of these remarks. They were very cheerful and full of mutual confidences. Oswald confiding to Cara his doubts and difficulties, his aspirations (which were chiefly in verse) and light-hearted anticipations, not going so far as to be called hopes, of sitting one day on the woolsack. Cara, though she had a great respect for Oswald, did not think much about the woolsack. But it was astonishing how she got used to him, how she liked him, and, notwithstanding the occasional dull evenings, how much more variety seemed to have come into her life. Sometimes Mrs. Meredith herself would talk to the girl about her son.

'If he would work more steadily I should be happier, Cara,' she would say; 'and perhaps if he had a strong inducement he would work. He is so clever, and able to do what he likes.'

Cara did not know about this; but she liked his lively company. They were the best of friends; they talked to each other of every foolish thing that comes into the heads of

young people; but she had a vague idea that he did not talk to her as the others thought he did. He was not like Roger even; though Roger was no more like him than night was like day. Roger was—different. She could not have told how, and nobody knew of this difference nor spoke to her on the subject. And thus life floated on very pleasantly, with more excitement than had existed in that placid school-girl life at the Hill. Miss Cherry came two or three times on a day's visit to her darling, and observed what was going on and was puzzled; but Aunt Charity had her first attack of bronchitis that year, and it was winter weather, not good for travelling.

'Yes, I think she's happy on the whole,' was Miss Cherry's report to the elder aunt when she went home—which, as may be supposed, was not a clear enough deliverance for Aunt Charity.

'Is the young man in love with her?' said the old lady; 'is she in love with him? James should not be such a fool as to let them be constantly together, unless it is a match that would please him.'

'James is not thinking of anything of the

kind,' said Miss Cherry, impatiently. 'James is taken up with his own affairs, and he thinks Cara a little girl still.'

'To be sure he does—that is where men always go wrong,' said Aunt Charity, 'and James will always be a fool to the end of the chapter.'

Cherry winced at this, for she was the model of a good sister, and never had seen any man who was so much her ideal as James—though in some things he was foolish, she was obliged to allow. Perhaps, as Aunt Charity was ill, and the house, as it were, shut up and given over to invalidism for the winter, it was as well that Cara should be away, getting some enjoyment of her young life. Had she been at home it would have been dull for her, for Miss Cherry was in almost constant attendance upon the old lady. Thus things had turned out very well, as they so often do, even when they look least promising. Had Cara been at the Hill, Miss Cherry would not have been so free to devote herself to Aunt Charity, and both the child and the old lady would have suffered. True, Miss Cherry's own life might have had a little additional brightness, but who thought of that?

She did not herself, and you may be sure no one else did. It was altogether a fortunate arrangement, as things had turned out, and as for Cara, why was there not Providence to watch over her, if her father was remiss? Miss Cherry felt that there was something like infidelity in the anxious desire she felt sometimes to go and help Providence in this delicate task.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OLD PEOPLE.

When Mrs. Beresford died, as has been described, there was a great flutter of talk and private discussion among all who knew her about the particulars of her death. It was 'so sudden at the last,' after giving every indication of turning out a lingering and slow malady, that public curiosity was very greatly excited on the subject. True, the talk was suppressed peremptorily by Mr. Maxwell whenever he came across it, charitably by other less authoritative judges; but it lingered, as was natural, and perhaps the bereaved husband did not have all that fulness of sympathy which generally attends so great a loss. There were many people, indeed, to whom it appeared that such a loss was worse even than a more simple and less mysterious one, and that the survivor was entitled to more instead of less pity; but mys-

terious circumstances always damp the public sympathy more or less, and people do not like to compromise themselves by kindness which might seem complicity or guilty knowledge if, in the course of time, anything not known at the moment should be found out. Thus James Beresford, though much pitied, did not meet with that warmth of personal sympathy which circumstances like his so often call forth. He was not himself sensible of it indeed, being too miserable to take any notice of what was going on around him; but most of his friends were fully sensible of this fact, and aware that but few overtures of active kindness were made to the melancholy man, whose very abandonment of his home and life made another item in the mysterious indictment against him, of which everybody felt the burden yet nobody knew the rights. It was in these painful circumstances that Mrs. Meredith first formed the link which now associated her with her next door neighbour. The first time he had come home after his wife's death, which was only for a week or two, the kind woman had met him, indeed had laid her simple, tender-hearted plan to meet him—going listlessly into his forsaken

house. She had gone up to him, holding out her hand, her features all moved and quivering with feeling. 'Won't you come in and sit with me in the evening?' she said. 'It is the time one feels one's loneliness most—and my boys are away, Mr. Beresford.' Her soft eyes, as she raised them to him, were full of tears; her look so pitiful, so full of fellow-feeling, that his heart was as much touched for her as hers seemed to be for him. Of all ways of consolation, is there any so effective as that of leading those whom you grieve for to grieve also a little for you, as a fellow-sufferer? His heart was touched. He could not persuade himself to go the very first evening, but he came soon, and when he had come once returned again and again. It was the first new habit he formed after that mournful breaking-up of all his habits. He could not bear much at a time of the dismal place which he still called home; but now and then he was forced to be there, and when he came this new sweet habit gave him a little strength to meet the chaos into which his life otherwise was thrown. Did not Dante, too, get a little comfort from the sweet looks of that sympathising woman who used to

glance at him from her window after the lady of his heart was carried by the angels to heaven? There was no wrong to his Annie in that refuge which kindness made for him from the miseries of the world. Eventually it became a matter of course that he should seek that shelter. He went out of his own house and knocked at her door mechanically, and would sit by her, content only to be there, often saying little, getting himself softly healed and soothed, and made capable of taking up again the burden of his life. She was not the same kind of woman as his wife—her habits of mind were different. The variety, the fluctuating charm, the constant movement and change that were in Mrs. Beresford did not exist in this other. She would sit and work by the lamplight, looking up sweetly to answer, but happy to be silent if her companion liked it. She made herself always the second and not the first, responding, not leading; her gift was to divine what was in others, to follow where they went. It was this that made her so popular with all her friends. When they came to her for advice she would give it without that doubt and fear of responsibility which restrains so

many people. For why? she had a rule which was infallible, and which made her safe from responsibility, although she was not herself aware how closely she acted upon it. Her infallible guide was a faculty of seeing what people themselves wished, how their own judgments were tending, and what individually they wanted to do. This she followed sometimes consciously, but often quite unconsciously, as habit led her, and she was never afraid of saying Do this, or Do that. It was one of her great attractions. She might be wise or she might be less than wise, in her decisions, her friends said, but she never shilly-shallied, never was afraid of saying to you with sweet frankness and boldness what she thought it would be good to do.

The consequence of this simple rule was that good advice from Mrs. Meredith's lips was ever so much more popular than good advice had ever been known to be before. It is not a commodity which is generally admired, however admirable it may be; but those whom she advised were not only edified but flattered and brightened. It made themselves feel more wise. It was sweet at once to the giver and

to the receiver, and kindled an increased warmth of sympathy between them. Now and then, to be sure, the course of action she recommended might not be a successful one, but is not that the case with all human counsel? This, which was the secret of her power with all her other friends, subjugated James Beresford too. As there is nothing so dear to a man as his own way, so there is no individual so dear as that friend who will recommend and glorify his own way to him, and help him to enjoyment of it. This she did with a gentle patience and constancy which was wonderful. It was natural to her, like all great gifts, and the great charm of it all was that few people suspected the reflection from their own feelings and sentiments which coloured Mrs. Meredith's mind, nor was she at all invariably aware of it herself. Sometimes she believed implicitly in her own advice as the natural growth of her own thoughts and experiences, and believed herself to have an independent judgment. And it is to be supposed that she had opinions and ideas—certainly she had ways of her own, the brightest, and kindest, and most caressing that could be conceived.

This was the secret of those absences which had left Cara so lonely. They had become now the confirmed and constant habit of her father's life. And it would be vain to say that this had been done without remark. While he was at home for a week or two only in a year no one said anything about his frequent visits to the kind neighbour who was not even a widow; but lately he had stayed longer when he came back to the Square, sometimes remaining a month instead of a week, and now it was understood that he had returned 'for good.' Both Mrs. Meredith and Mr. Beresford had, it may be supposed, friends who took the responsibility of their conduct, and thought it necessary to supervise them in their innocent but unusual intimacy, and these excellent persons were in the attitude of suspended judgment waiting to see what difference Cara's presence would make, and that of Oswald, in the one house and the other. But it had not as yet made any very apparent difference. At nine o'clock, or thereabouts, the door would shut in the one house, and Cook and John would exchange glances; while in the other the bell would tinkle, and the two maids, who divided

John's duties between them, would say, 'There is Mr. Beresford, as usual!' and shrug their shoulders. He came in, and they did not take the trouble now even to announce the habitual visitor, who had his special chair and his special corner, as if he belonged to the house. Sometimes the two friends would talk long and much, sometimes they scarcely talked at all. They knew each other like brother and sister, and yet there was between them a delicate separation such as does not exist between relations. In the warm room, softly lighted and friendly, the man who had been wounded found a refuge which was more like the old blessedness of home than anything else could be, and yet was not that blessedness. It did not occur to him that because his daughter had come back to him he was to be banished from this other shelter. Cara's coming, indeed, had scarcely been her father's doing. Many discussions on the point had taken place among all his friends, and Mrs. Meredith had been spurred up by everybody to represent his duty to him. She had done it with a faint sense in her mind that it would affect herself in some ur desirable way,

and with a certainty that she was departing altogether from her usual rule of argument with the personal wishes of her clients. Mr. Beresford had no personal wish on the subject. He preferred rather that Cara should stay where she was happy. 'If she comes here what can I do for her?' he said. 'My society is not what a girl will like. I cannot take her to the dances and gaieties which will please her.'

'Why not?' Mrs. Meredith had said.

'Why not!' He was petrified by her want of perception. 'What could I do in such places? And she is happy where she is. She has women about her who know how to manage her. Her coming would derange my life altogether. You, who feel everybody's difficulties, you must feel this. What am I to do with a girl of seventeen? It would be wretched for her, and it could not be any addition to my happiness.'

'Don't you think too much of that,' said Mrs. Meredith, faltering; for indeed this was not at all her way. And it was hard for her to go against those feelings on the part of her companion which, on ordinary occasions, she followed implicitly. Even for herself Cara's

presence would complicate the relations generally; but when she saw her duty, she did it, though with faltering. Everybody else had spurred and goaded her up to this duty, and she would not shrink. 'If you are going to settle, you ought to have your child with you.'

'That you should dwell like this upon abstract oughts!' said Mr. Beresford; 'you, who are so full of understanding of personal difficulties. It is not like you. If I feel that Cara is better where she is—happier, more suitably cared for——'

'Still, you know when the father is settled at home his only child should be with him,' Mrs. Meredith reiterated. She was faithful to her *consigne*. If she did not see it, other people did, for whom she was the mouthpiece. But it will be perceived that those persons were right who said she was not clever. When she was not following her favourite and congenial pursuit of divining others and reflecting them in her own person, she was reduced to this helpless play of reiteration, and stuck to her one point till everybody was tired of it. Beresford was so impatient that he got up from his chair and began to pace up and down the room.

'There is reason in all things,' he said. 'My house now is emphatically a bachelor house, my servants suit me, my life is arranged as I like it, or at least as I can support it best. Cara would make a revolution in everything. What should I do with her? How should I amuse her? for, of course, she would want amusement. And she is happy, quite happy, where she is; nowhere could she be so well as she is now. My aunt and my sister are wrapt up in her. Yes, yes, of course I am fond of my poor little girl; but what could I do with her? You are always so reasonable—but not here.'

'She should be with her father,' said Mrs. Meredith, sticking to her *consigne*; and of course he thought it was perversity and opposition, and never divined what it cost her to maintain, against all her habits of mind, the opposite side. When, however, it appeared by the Sunninghill letters that the ladies there took the same view, Mr. Beresford had no more to say. He yielded, but not with a good grace. 'You shall have your will,' he said; 'but Cara will not be happy.' He did not take Oswald Meredith into consideration, or any such strange influence; and as for changing his own habits,

how was that to be thought of? Life was hard enough anyhow, with all the alleviations which fate permitted. Did anyone suppose that a girl of seventeen, whom he scarcely knew, could be made into a companion for him by the mere fact that she was his daughter? No; his mornings, which were occupied with what he called hard work; his afternoons, which he spent among his serious friends in his clubs and learned societies; and that evening hour, most refreshing to his soul of any, in which the truest sympathy, the tenderest kindness proved a cordial which kept him alive—which of these, was it to be supposed, he would give up for the society of little Cara? He was very glad to give her all that was wanted for her comfort—a good careful attendant, plenty of dresses and pocket-money, and so forth; but he could not devote himself, surely (who could expect it?), to the society of a child. That anyone should expect this gave him even a little repulsion from, a half-prejudice against her. When she appeared, with that serious, half-disapproving look of hers, and when he realised her, seated upstairs in that drawing-room which he had never entered since her mother's death, among

all her mother's relics, recalling to him at once a poignant sense of his loss and a sharp thrill of conscious pain, in having so far surmounted that loss and put it behind him, the impulse of separation came still more strongly upon him. He shut himself up in his study more determinedly in the morning, and in the evening had more need than ever of the consoling visits which wound him up and kept his moral being in harmony. He had to ask Mrs. Meredith her advice and her opinion, and to ask even her guidance in respect to Cara. Who could tell him so well what to do with a girl as the kindest and best of women? Oswald, who had been at home for some time, did not like these visits so well as his mother did. No one ever suggested to the young man that he was *de trop*; but to be sure there were pauses in their conversation when this third person was present, and allusions would be made which he did not understand. So that latterly he had been out or in the library downstairs when Mr. Beresford came; very often out, which Mrs. Meredith did not like, but did not know how to prevent, for to be sure she felt the embarrassment also of her son's slight disapproval, and of the restraint his

presence produced. Why should he cause a restraint? her boy! but she felt that he did so, and it made her unhappy. It was pleasanter in the former evenings, when Mr. Beresford came home only now and then, and there was neither a Cara nor an Oswald to perplex the simple state of affairs.

'How is she to amuse herself!' Mr. Beresford said to her. 'Yes, yes, I know you will do what you can—when was there ever a time when you did not do what you could and more?—but I cannot take her about, I cannot have anyone in the house to keep her company, and how is she to live there, a young girl, alone?'

'I think Cara will do very well,' said Mrs. Meredith. 'She can always come to me. I have told her so; and the people we know are all beginning to call. She will soon have plenty of friends. People will invite her, and you must go with her here and there.'

'*I* go with her? You know how I hate going out!'

'Once at least—say only once. You must do that, and then you will find Cara will have her own friends; she will not be a difficulty

any longer. I am glad you trust in me to do what I can for her—and Oswald.'

'Of course I trust in you,' he said; 'but it will break up everything. I know it will—after coming to a kind of calm, after feeling that I can settle down again, and that life is not utterly distasteful to me—you will not wonder that I should be frightened for everything. And you, who have done so much for me.'

'I have not done anything,' said Mrs. Meredith, looking up smiling from her book.

'You say so, but it is you who have done everything; and if I am to be plucked from my refuge now, and pitched forth upon the world——I believe I am a coward. I shrink from mere outside intercourse, from being knocked up against one and another, and shut out from what I prize most.'

'How can that be?' she said; 'you get fretful, you men, when everything does not go as you wish. Have a little patience. When Oswald came home, it seemed at first as if he, dear boy, was going to upset all my habits; but it was a vain fear. The first little strangeness is over, and he has settled down; and we

are happy—happier than ever. It will be the same with Cara and you.'

Beresford gave a half-groan of dissent. I fear Mrs. Meredith saw that it had a double meaning, and that it expressed a certain impatience of her son as well as of his daughter; but this was one of the things which she would not see.

'Yes,' she said, with a little nod of her head, 'I will answer for it, it will be just the same with Cara and you.'

Mr. Beresford gave a little snort at this of absolute dissatisfaction. 'I don't like changes of any kind,' he said; 'when we have got to be tolerably well in this dismal world, why not be content with it, and stop there! *Le mieux est l'ennemi du bien.* How true that is! and yet what can be better than well? I dislike changes, and this almost more than any other. I foresee it will bring me a thousand troubles —not to you, I hope,' he said, his voice slightly faltering; 'it would be unbearable indeed if it brought any trouble to you.'

'Cara cannot bring any trouble to me,' she said brightly; 'of that I am sure enough: you are making a ghost of the dearest child. By

and by you will see how sweet she is and how good.'

'All girls have a way of being sweet and good,' he said cynically, which was a mood quite uncongenial to him and out of his way.

'That is not like you,' said Mrs. Meredith.

He knew it was not. The thought had passed through his own mind that the saying was ungenerous and unworthy of him, and unworthy of utterance in her presence. What could any man be worth who could utter one of those foolish stock taunts against women in any stage of life, before a woman who was to him the queen of friends, the essence of everything consolatory and sweet. 'You are always right,' he replied hastily, 'and I am wrong, as a matter of course. I am out of sorts. I had but just caught hold of life again and found it practicable, and here seems something that may unsettle all; but I am wrong, it is almost certain, and you must be right.'

'That is a delightful sentiment—for me; but I am sure of my ground about Cara. Oh, quite sure!' she said, 'as sure—as I am of my own boys.'

Beresford did not say anything, but he

breathed a short impatient sigh. Her boys were all very well at a distance. When they had been absent he had been fond of them, and had shared in the sentiment expressed by all Mrs. Meredith's friends, of regret for their absence; but when a small share even of a woman's company has become one of your daily comforts it is difficult not to find her grown-up son in your way. He reflected upon this as he shook hands with her, and went back to his dwelling-place next door with a consciousness of impatience which was quite unjustifiable. To be sure her grown-up son had a right to her which nothing could gainsay, and was, in a sort of a way, master of the house under her, and might even have a kind of right to show certain mild objections and dislikes to special visitors. Mr. Beresford could not deny these privileges of a son; but they galled him, and there was in his mind an unexpressed irritation against those troublesome members of the new generation who would thrust themselves in the way of their elders, and tread upon their heels perpetually. Children were much pleasanter than these grown-up young people. He did not see the use of them. Cara, for instance, though it was supposed she

was to keep house for her father, of what use was she in the house? Cook (naturally) knew a hundred times more than she did, and kept everything going as on wheels. As for Oswald Meredith, who had been a sprightly and delightful boy, what was he now?—an idle young man about town, quite beyond his mother's management; doing nothing, probably good for nothing, idling away the best years of his life. Why did not she send him to India, as he was doing so little here? What an ease to everybody concerned that would be! He thought of it in the most philosophical way, as good for everybody, best for the young man—a relief to his mother's anxieties, a thing which his best friends must desire. What a pity that it could not be done at once! But it would scarcely be good policy on his part to suggest it to Oswald's mother. She might think he had other motives; and what motive could he have except to promote the welfare of the son of such a kind friend?

CHAPTER XV.

ROGER.

Roger Burchell had set his mind steadily, from the moment of Cara's translation to her father's house, upon spending those Sundays, which he had hitherto passed at home, with his aunt at Notting Hill. But the rest of the world has a way of throwing obstacles in the path of heroes of twenty in a quite incredible and heartless manner. It was not that the authorities at the Rectory made any serious objections. There was so many of them that one was not missed—and Roger was not one of the more useful members of the family. He had no voice, for one thing, and therefore was useless in church; and he declined Sunday-school work, and was disposed to be noisy, and disturbed the attention of the little ones; therefore he could be dispensed with at home, and nobody cared to interfere with his inclinations. Neither had

the aunt at Notting Hill any objection to Roger—he was a friendly boy, willing to take a quiet walk, ready to be kind to those who were kind to him—and to have somebody to share her solitary Sunday's dinner, and make her feel like other people when she went to church, was pleasant to her. He was a boy who never would want to shirk morning church, or keep the servants from it, to get him a late breakfast, like so many young men. But accident, not evil intention, came in Roger's way. His aunt fell ill, and then something went wrong at the Engineering College, and leave was withheld—entirely by caprice or mistake, for Roger of course, was sure of being entirely innocent, as such youthful sufferers generally are. The upshot was, that his first Sunday in London did not really occur until Cara had been a whole month in her new home. How he chafed and fretted under this delay it is unnecessary to tell. It seemed to him an age since that October afternoon when the sun was so warm on the Hill, and Cara stood by his side looking over the country in its autumn tints, and watching the shadows fly and the lights gleam over St. George's. What a long time it was! the mel-

low autumn had stolen away into the fogs of winter; November is but the next month, yet what a difference there is between its clammy chills, and the thick air that stifles and chokes you, and that warmth and sunny glow with which red-breasted October sings the fall of the leaves and the gathering-in of the fruit! And in that time how much might have happened. Had it been dreary for her all by herself in London, separated from her friends? or had she found new people to keep her cheerful, and forgotten the friends of her youth? These were the questions the lad asked himself as he went up to town from Berkshire, on the evening of Saturday, the 25th of November. All that he had heard of since she left had been from a letter which Miss Cherry had read to his sister Agnes, and from which it appeared that Cara felt London lonely, and regretted her friends in the country. 'How I wish I could have a peep at all of you or any of you!' she had said. Agnes had been pleased with the expression, and so was he. 'All of us or any of us,' he said to himself for the hundredth time as the train flew over the rain-sodden country. He thought, with a thrill at his heart, that her face would

light up, as he had seen it do, and she would be glad to see him. She would put into his that small hand, that seemed to melt in his grasp like a flake of snow ; and perhaps there would come upon her cheek that faint crimson, which only things very pleasant brought there—the reflection of a sweet excitement. What an era that would be for Roger! he dreamt it out moment by moment, till he almost felt that it had occurred. Sometimes a dream of the other kind would start across him—a horrible fancy that he would find her happy among others, making new friends, forgetting the old ; but this was too painful to be encouraged. He thought the train as slow as an old hackney coach, when at last, after all these delays, he got away and found himself actually on the road to London and to her, and thought of a story he had heard of someone in hot haste, as he was, who had jumped out of his carriage and pushed it on behind to arrive the sooner. Roger felt disposed to do so, though his train was an express, and though he knew he could not go to the Square that evening to see her. But he was so much nearer her when he got to Notting Hill. She was on one side of the Park and he on the other. Next day

he would walk across, through all the Sunday people, through the yellow fog, under the bare-branched trees, and knock at her door. There was still a moment of suspense, still a long wintry night—and then!

His aunt thought very well of the young man when he got to Notting Hill. She was his mother's sister, a widow and without children, and Roger had been named after her husband, the late Captain Brandon, whose portrait hung over her mantelpiece, and whose memory was her pride. She thought her nephew was like her side of the house, not 'those Burchells,' and felt a thrill of pride as he came in, tall and strong, in his red-brown hair and budding moustache, with a touch of autumn colour about him in the heavy despondency of the November day.

'What weather!' she said, 'what weather, Roger! I daresay it is a little better in the country; but we have nothing else to expect in November, when the wind blows up the smoke out of the city.

Roger hastened to assure her that the country was a great deal worse, that the river was like a big, dismal ditch, full of mists and rains,

and that town, with its cheerful lights and cheerful company, was the only place. Aunt Mary let herself be persuaded. She gave him a nice little dish of cutlets with his tea. She asked him questions about his mother and sister, and whether his papa's opinions were not getting modified by experience and by the course of events.

'Hasn't he learnt to take warning by all this Romanising?' she asked, and shook her head at Roger's doubtful reply. She differed so much in ecclesiastical opinion from her brother-in-law, that she very seldom went to the Rectory. But she was glad to hear all about her godchild, little Mary, and how Philip was getting on at Cambridge. And how pleasant it was to have someone to talk to, instead of sitting all alone and melancholy, thinking, or reading the newspaper. She made much of Roger, and told him he would always be welcome; he was to come as often as he pleased.

'I shall see her to-morrow,' Roger said to himself, as he laid his head upon his pillow. The thought did not stop him from sleeping; why should it? but it suggested a string of dreams, some of which were terribly tanta-

lising. He was just putting out his hand to take hers, just about to hear the answer to some momentous question, when he would wake suddenly and lose it all; but still even the disappointment only awakened him to the fact that he was to see her to-morrow; he was to see her to-morrow; nay, to-day, though this yellow glimmer did not look much like daylight. He got up the moment he was called, and dressed with much pains and care—too much care. When his toilet was careless Roger looked, as he was, a gentleman; but when he took extra pains, a Sunday look crept about him, a certain stiffness, as of a man occupying clothes to which he was unaccustomed. His frock-coat—it was his first—was uglier and squarer than even frock-coats generally are, his hat looked higher, his gloves a terrible bondage. Poor boy! but for Cara he never would have had that frock-coat; thus to look our best we look our worst, and evil becomes our good. But his aunt was much pleased with his appearance when he went to church with her, and thought his dress just what every gentleman ought to wear on Sunday.

'But your gloves are too tight, my dear,' she said.

Roger thought everything was tight, and was in twenty minds to abandon his fine clothes and put on the rough morning suit he had come in; but the frock-coat carried the day. He could not eat at Mrs. Brandon's early dinner. She was quite unhappy about him, and begged him not to stand on ceremony, but to tell her frankly if it was not to his mind. 'For if you are going to spend your Sundays with me it is just as easy to buy one thing as another,' Aunt Mary said, good, kind, deceived woman. She was very glad he should take a walk afterwards, hoping it would do him good.

'And I think perhaps I had better call at the Square and see Miss Beresford. Her aunt is sure to ask me when I see her,' he said.

'Do, my dear,' said the unsuspecting woman. And he set off across the park. It was damp enough and foggy enough to quench any man's courage. The Sunday people, who were out in spite of all disadvantages, were blue, half with the cold and half with the colour of the pitiless day. A few old ladies in

close broughams took their constitutional drive slowly round and round. What pleasure could they find in it? still, as it is the ordinance of heaven that there should be old ladies as well as young men of twenty, it was a good thing they had comfortable broughams to drive about in; and they had been young in their time, Roger supposed, feeling it hard upon everybody not to have the expectations, the hopes, that made his own heart beat. How it beat and thumped against his breast! He was almost sorry, though he was glad, when the walk was over and the tall roofs of the houses in the Square overshadowed him. His heart jumped higher still, though he thought it had been incapable of more, when he got to the house. 'Doors where my heart was used to beat.' He did not know any poetry to speak of, and these words did not come to him. He felt that she must be glad to see him, this dull, damp Sunday afternoon, the very time when heaven and earth stood still, when there was nothing to amuse or occupy the languid mind. No doubt she and her father would be sitting together, suppressing two mutual yawns, reading two dull books; or, oh, blessed chance!

perhaps her father would have retired to his library, and Cara would be alone. He pictured this to himself—a silent room, a Sunday solitude, a little drooping figure by the chimney-corner, brightening up at sight of a well-known face—when the drawing-room door opened before him, and his dream exploded like a bubble, and with a shock of self-derision and disappointment more bitter than honest Roger had ever felt in all his simple life before. There were several people in the room, but naturally Roger's glance sought out the only one he was interested in, the only one he knew in the little company. She was standing in front of one of the windows, the pale wintry light behind making a silhouette of her pretty figure, and the fine lines of her profile; but curiously enough, it was not she, after the first glance, who attracted Roger's gaze, but the other figure which stood beside her, close to her, young, and friendly, in all the confidence of intimacy. It was Oswald Meredith who was holding a book in which he was showing Cara something—she, holding the corner of it with one hand, drew it down to her level, and with a raised finger of the other seemed to check

what he was saying. They made the prettiest group; another young man, sitting at the table, gazing at the pair, thought so too, with an envious sentiment, not so strong or so bitter as Roger's, but enough to swear by. Oswald had all the luck, this young fellow was saying to himself: little Cara, too! Behind was Mrs. Meredith, sitting by the fire, and Mr. Beresford, gloomy and sombre, standing by her. It was the first time he had been in this room, and the visit had been made expressly for the purpose of dragging him into it. He stood near his friend, looking down, sometimes looking at her, but otherwise never raising his eyes. This, however, was a side scene altogether uninteresting to Roger. What was it to him what these two elder people might be feeling or thinking? All that he could see was Cara and 'that fellow,' who presumed to be there, standing by her side, occupying her attention. And how interested she looked! more than in all the years they had known each other she had ever looked for him.

Cara started at the sound of his name. 'Mr. Burchell? oh, something must be wrong at home!' she cried; then, turning round sud-

denly, stopped with a nervous laugh of relief. 'Oh, it is only Roger! what a fright you gave me! I thought it must be your father, and that Aunt Charity was ill. Papa, this is Roger Burchell, from the Rectory. You remember, he said he would come and see me. But, Roger, I thought you were coming directly, and it is quite a long time now since I left home.'

'I could not come sooner,' he said, comforted by this. 'I came as soon as ever I could. My aunt was ill and could not have me; and then there was some trouble at the College,' he added, hurriedly, feeling himself to be getting too explanatory. Cara had given him her hand; she had pointed to a chair near where she was standing; she had given up the book which Oswald now held, and over which he was looking, half-amused, at the new-comer. Roger was as much occupied by him, with hot instinct of rivalry, as he was with Cara herself, who was the goddess of his thoughts; and how the plain young engineer, in his stiff frock-coat, despised the handsome young man about town, so easy and so much at home! with a virulence of contempt which no one could have thought to be in Roger. 'Do you bite your thumb at me,

sir?' he was tempted to say, making up to him straight before the other had time to open his lips. But of course, being in civilised society, Roger did not dare to obey his impulse, though it stirred him to the heart.

'You don't introduce us to your friend, Cara,' said Oswald, smiling, in an undertone.

The fellow called her Cara! Was it all settled, then, and beyond hope, in four short weeks? Oh, what a fool Roger had been to allow himself to be kept away!

'Mr. Roger Burchell—Mr. Meredith—Mr. Edward Meredith,' said Cara, with a slight evanescent blush. 'Roger is almost as old a friend at the Hill as you are at the Square. We have all been children together;' and then there was a pause which poor little Cara, not used to keeping such hostile elements in harmony, did not know how to manage. She asked timidly if he had been at the Hill—if he had seen——?

'I came direct from the College last night,' he said; and poor Roger could not keep a little flavour of bitterness out of his tone, as who should say, 'A pretty fool I was to come at all!'

'The—College?' said Oswald, in his half-laughing tone.

'I mean only the Scientific College, not anything to do with a University,' said Roger, defiant in spite of himself. 'I am an engineer—a working man'—and though he said this as a piece of bravado, poor fellow! it is inconceivable how Sundayish, how *endimanché*, how much like a real working man in unused best raiment, he felt in his frock-coat.

'Oh, tell me about that!' said Mrs. Meredith, coming forward; 'it is just what I want to know. Mr. Roger Burchell, did you say, Cara? I think I used to know your mother. I have seen her with Miss Cherry Beresford? Yes; I thought it must be the same. Do you know I have a particular reason for wishing to hear about your College? One of my friends wants to send his son there if he can get in. Will you tell me about it? I know you want to talk to Cara——'

'Oh, no; not if she is engaged,' said Roger, and blushed hot with excessive youthful shame when he had made this foolish speech.

'She will not be engaged long, for we are going presently,' said the smiling gracious

woman, who began to exercise her usual charm upon the angry lad in spite of himself. She drew a chair near to the spot where he still stood defiant. 'I shall not keep you long,' she said; and what could Roger do but sit down, though so much against his will, and allow himself to be questioned?

'Your friend from the country is impatient of your other friends,' said Oswald, closing the book which he held out to Cara, and marking the place as he gave it to her. 'Do you want to get rid of us as much as he does?'

'He does not want to get rid of anyone, but he does not understand—society,' said Cara, in the same undertone. Roger could not hear what it was, but he felt sure they were talking of him, though he did his best to listen to Mrs. Meredith's questions. Then the other one rose, who was not so handsome as Oswald, and went to her other side, completely shutting her out from the eyes of the poor fellow who had come so far, and taken so much trouble to see her. The College—what did he care for the College! about which the soft-voiced stranger was questioning him. He made her vague broken answers, and turned round undisguisedly, poor

fellow! to where Cara stood; yet all he could see of her was the skirt of her blue dress from the other side of Edward Meredith, whose head, leaning forward, came between Roger and the girl on whom his heart was set.

'Mr. Burchell, Cara and her father are dining with my boys and me. Edward is only with me for a few hours; he is going away by the last train. Will not you come, too, and join us? Then Cara can see a little more of you. Do you stay in town to-night?'

Two impulses struggled in Roger's mind—to refuse disdainfully, or to accept gratefully. In the first case he would have said he had dined already, making a little brag of his aunt's early hours—in the second—a calculation passed very quickly through his mind, so quick that it was concluded almost before Mrs. Meredith's invitation.

'I could,' he said, faltering; 'or, perhaps, if your son is going I might go, too, which would be best——'

'Very well, then, it is a bargain,' she said, putting out her hand with a delightful smile. He felt how warm and sweet it was, even though he was trying at the moment to see

Cara. This was the kind of mother these fellows had, and Cara living next door! Surely all the luck seems to be centred on some people; others have no chance against them. He stood by while Mrs. Meredith got up, drawing her sons with her. 'Come, boys, you can carry on your talk later,' she said. 'Good-by for the moment, Cara mia.' Then she turned to Mr. Beresford, who stood gloomily, with his eyes bent on the fire. 'You are not sorry you have broken the spell?' she said, with a voice which she kept for him alone, or so at least he thought.

He gave his shoulders a hasty shrug. 'We can talk of that later. I am going to see you to the door,' he said, giving her his arm. The boys lingered. Oswald was patting his book affectionately with one hand. It was Edward who was 'making the running' now.

'You are still coming to dine, Cara?' he said. 'Don't turn me off for this friend. He cannot be such an old friend as I am; and I have only a few hours——'

'So has he,' said Cara; 'and he told me he was coming. What am I to do?'

'There are three courses that you can

pursue,' said Oswald. 'Leave him, as Ned recommends; stay with him, as I certainly don't recommend; or bring him with you. And which of these, Cara, you may choose will be a lesson as to your opinion of us. But you can't stay with him; that would be a slight to my mother, and your father would not allow it. The compromise would be to bring him.'

'Oh, how can I do that, unless Mrs. Meredith told me to do it? No; perhaps he will go away of himself—perhaps——'

'Poor wretch! he looks unhappy enough,' said Edward, with a sympathy of fellow-feeling. Oswald laughed. The misery and offence in the new-comer's face was only amusing to him.

'Cara,' he said, 'if you are going to begin offensive warfare, and to flaunt young men from the country in our faces, I for one will rebel. It is not fair to us; we were not prepared for anything of the sort.'

'My mother is calling us,' said Edward, impatiently. Two or three times before his brother had irritated him to-day. Either he was in a very irritable mood, or Oswald was more provoking than usual. 'I have only a few hours,' he continued, aggrieved, in a low

tone, 'and I have scarcely spoken to you, Cara; and it was you and I who used to be the closest friends. Don't you remember? Oswald can see you when he pleases; I have only one day. You won't disappoint us, will you? I wish you'd go'—this was to his brother—'I'll follow. There are some things I want to speak to Cara about, and you have taken her up all the afternoon with your poetry. Yes, yes; I see, there is *him* behind; but, Cara, look here, you won't be persuaded to stay away to-night?'

'Not if I can help it,' said the girl, who was too much embarrassed by this first social difficulty to feel the flattery involved. She turned to Roger, when the others went downstairs, with a somewhat disturbed and tremulous smile.

'They are our next-door neighbours, and they are very kind,' she said. 'Mrs. Meredith is so good to me; as kind as if she were a relation' (this was all Cara knew of relationships). 'I don't know what I should do without her; and I have known the boys all my life. Roger, won't you sit down? I am so sorry to have been taken up like this the very moment you came.'

'But if they live next door, and you know them so well, I daresay you are very often taken up like this,' said Roger, 'and that will be hard upon your country friends. And I think,' he added, taking courage as he found that the door remained closed, and that not even her father (estimable man!) came back, that we have a better claim than they have; for you were only a child when you came to the Hill, and you have grown up there.'

'I like all my old friends,' said Cara, evasively. 'Some are—I mean they differ—one likes them for different things.'

The poor boy leaped to the worse interpretation of this, which, indeed, was not very far from the true one. 'Some are poorer and not so fine as others,' he said; 'but, perhaps, Cara, the rough ones, the homely ones, those you despise, are the most true.'

'I don't despise anyone,' she said, turning away, and taking up Oswald Meredith's book.

By Jove! even when he was gone was 'that fellow' to have the best of it with his confounded book? Roger's heart swelled; and then he felt that expediency was very much to be thought of, and that when a man could not

have all he wanted it was wise to put up with what he could get.

'Cara, don't be angry with me,' he said. 'I shall like your friends, too, if—if you wish me. The lady is very nice and kind, as you say. She has asked me to go there to dinner, too.'

'You!' Cara said, with (he thought) a gleam of annoyance. Roger jumped up, wild with rage and jealousy, but then he sat down again, which was certainly the best thing for him to do.

CHAPTER XVI.

SUNDAY EVENING.

To sit down in your morning clothes, painfully conscious of a blue tie with a pin in it, at a decorous dinner-table with three men in correct evening dress, and two ladies—not indeed bare-shouldered according to ancient use, but yet arrayed in all the niceties of that demi-toilette which is the despair of the vulgar—is in itself no small trial to a sensitive and thin-skinned youth. Roger Burchell had not been able to resist the spell which Mrs. Meredith exercised upon everybody who came near her, nor had he been able to count the cost of that evening spent in Cara's society, and to strike a balance between the pain it would cause him and the pleasure to be procured from it. He was not calm enough to do this. He had not thought of any pain involved, but snatched at the chance of carrying out his hopes and spending the

evening in her society without thinking of any results. To be sure, instinctive dislike and repugnance had moved him at the first sight of the two young men. What did they want here? What had Cara to do with them? But that was all; and he had not realised how hard it would be to sit by and see these natural enemies so much nearer and more intimate with Cara than himself, linked to her by ties even of older friendship than he could boast of, poor fellow. All this was unthought-of misery. It was true that after the Merediths went away in the short interval before dinner he had half-an-hour with Cara by herself—but she asked him questions about his aunt and about his little sisters, showing no interest in himself, and at last begged him to excuse her, as she must get ready for dinner. Even then he did not know how dark his fate was to be; but he could not get ready for dinner. He looked at himself in the glass, and at his blue tie which he had thought so well of in the morning. The best that anyone could say for poor Roger was that he looked like a respectable mechanic in his Sunday costume, and a consciousness of this fact impressed itself upon his own mind for the first time. Yes

—the long glass in the glimmering half-lighted drawing-room showed him his own image as no glass at home had ever done—like an engineer in his Sunday clothes, one of his practical 'mates' in the workshop, who showed him how to make boilers and screws, and asked him for beer—exactly like one of them. While this latter thought was in his mind, Cara came softly into the room in her white dress, the most perfect dainty creature, tearing poor Roger's heart in two. How unlike she was to himself in his blue tie! he felt as if he could never leave her, and yet wished himself with his aunt in Notting Hill; for what had he to do here?

The dinner was not, perhaps, the abundant meal which Roger had been used to see on occasions when there was company. There was no huge joint, no pair of visible fowls, with a tongue placed between them, which was his mother's grand dish, but a succession of small matters handed round, which Roger tried to despise. He tried hard to despise everything—the over-dress (as he felt it to be), the flowers on the dainty table, the ready flow of talk. How could these fellows find so much to say? He could have talked to Cara (perhaps) had they

been alone together; but to chatter as these fellows did—he could as soon fly, he said to himself. There were no decorous silences, no long pauses, such as he had been used to, but a constant, easy flow of this, which, no doubt, they called conversation! It could not be said that he himself added much to it. Now and then, after considerable pondering, he would fire off a remark, but this seldom happened till after the subject had been dismissed by the others, and when it required a polite effort on their parts to make out what he meant; and he discovered this with a hot blush of shame as soon as his little speech was made. The only comfort he had was that Cara did not talk very much either; but then she listened with pleased looks while the Meredith family chattered. How they all chattered, mother and sons! Roger did not think they could be quite—he did not know what word to use—not quite—. Perfectly respectable people did not, so far as he knew, indulge in such streams of conversation. He felt there was something wrong in so much talk.

And when they went upstairs after dinner it was still worse. Mr. Beresford and the others

did not sit over their wine, which Roger would have thought the best thing possible had he found themselves satisfactory; but as this was not the case, and he was sure that the only object of the young Merediths in not staying below and drinking themselves stupid was anxiety to be with Cara, too, he took their quick move as another sign of depravity. It was new-fashioned, it was un-English, it was almost wicked. He followed upstairs with a protest in his soul. Cara and Mrs. Meredith were sitting together over the fire. They drew a little apart as the others came in, and Mr. Beresford placed himself by the elder lady, and Oswald by Cara. So! Roger said to himself, that was the habitual way in which they arranged themselves—nothing could be more clear; flirtation, nothing but flirtation, between the old people and between the young people. It was more than wrong, it was monstrous. He supposed such things did happen in London society, where everything that was bad happened; but to think of poor little, innocent Cara being thrown into the midst of such a set of people! Roger could scarcely command his feelings. After standing about behind-backs for a time with Edward,

who, to tell the truth, seemed a little 'out of it' too, Roger's sense of horror forced him forward to the front of the fire, where he suddenly placed himself with that temerity of enraged shyness which is bolder than assurance. At all events, there could be no particular conversation between Oswald and Cara while he stood there.

This made a little break in the low-voiced talk. Mrs. Meredith, who sat on the other side in a low chair, with a little table by her elbow, on which stood a lamp, turned from Mr. Beresford to look at him. He could not easily think ill of this soft-smiling lady; but he made an effort, and succeeded even in this.

'Are you at the University, Mr. Burchell?' she said, smiling upon him.

There was some work lying upon her little table. He jumped at this evidence of Sabbath-breaking and profanity with inward satisfaction as a sign that she must be bad too.

'No,' he said, with unnecessary explanatoriness, 'I am not so lucky. I have got my own way to make in the world. I have to start work at once. I was afraid you would give me credit for more than I deserved. My brother's at Cambridge, for he is going into the Church;

but as for me, I've got my own way to make in the world.'

'So have the rest of us,' said Oswald. 'You must not take such high ground of superiority. We have all got our own way to make in the world.'

'That is all very well,' said Roger, determined to separate himself from all resemblance to his companions; 'but I'm a rough, practical man, not in your elegant way. I'm an engineer —I am going to India, I suppose——'

'And so, I suppose, am I,' said Edward, looking, as Roger thought, towards Cara with a sigh. 'But I am not very fond of the idea. I hope you like it better than I do?'

'Nobody will ask my opinion whether I like it or not,' said Roger. He caught a glimpse of himself at this moment in a mirror opposite, and his blue tie seemed to glare at him and force him on. 'I shall have to do whatever will make me independent soonest. They've got a number of children at home.'

'It is very fine to be independent,' said Mrs. Meredith, in her soft way; 'or at least so all you boys think. You like to be able to do what you please without reference to your

fathers and mothers.' She looked at her own boys as she spoke, not at Roger, and even this added to his exasperation. How different they were with this soft mother, whose very look was a caress, from what he was, with all the children at home, and a father and mother whom numbers made impartial, and who had few prejudices in Roger's favour. Poor boy, his heart swelled with a sense of his disadvantages; and naturally he did all he could to make them show the more.

'Independence don't mean that sort of thing to me,' he said; 'it is taking the expense off my father, that's what they think of. I must get my own living as soon as I can, that is what it means; and if it is not a very good living, so much the worse for me. No one else will pay much attention. Whether one does what one likes or does what one must, makes all the difference——'

'That is spoken like a philosopher,' said Mr. Beresford, who had been looking at the young bear thus making uncouth noises of self-assertion with distasteful amusement; 'but you must recollect that very few of us have the privilege of doing what we like. When

we get this advantage, it is generally when we cease to prize it, when we should be thankful to go back to the *must*, and be under force again.'

Under other circumstances Roger could only have been respectful of Cara's father, but he was otherwise inspired now, and ready to defy even that most privileged of mortals. 'So you people say, sir,' he said, with a rough show of respect, 'who have things all your own way. So long as you don't know what it is to be under force of circumstances, I suppose it seems rather fine than otherwise to do your duty though you don't like it. I have thought that myself now and again. It looks self-denying and all that; but if it's true, as people say, that you do best what you like best, I don't see the good of self-denial in that way.'

'I agree with Mr. Burchell,' said Oswald; 'but I go further. What is the good of self-denial in any way? It always involves unkindness to somebody. Nature gives you a beautiful day, for instance, and you turn your back upon her and work. What could be more unkind and ungrateful? Or Cara says to me, "Come out and play croquet in the Square——"'

'I hate croquet,' cried Cara, indignantly.

'I never did such a thing in my life; besides, it is winter, and I could not play croquet if I liked it ever so much.'

'What does it matter about details? I use the word croquet as a symbol—or my mother requires my attendance upon her somewhere. Then the rest of the world turn round and call me idle! Self-denial is a disagreeable quality, Cara. Let us avoid it. At the best it is only extracting merit out of necessity, for nobody denies himself except when he's obliged to do so.'

'Sybarite!' said Mrs. Meredith, shaking her head at her son; and then she turned to talk to Mr. Beresford, and the four young people were left to themselves.

'Sit down, Roger,' said Cara; 'why should you stand up there as if you were defying the world. You are all quite wrong. It is not self-denial to do what you are forced to do. When you give up anything of your own free will because it is right, then perhaps——'

'Only perhaps, Cara? Don't take away the little satisfaction one has in doing a thing that is disagreeable. Look here,' said Edward, suddenly seating himself in the vacant place by her which Roger had neglected to take, 'going

to India is very disagreeable to me. I think I could do just as well at home. My feeling is all against it; I might, perhaps, make more money there, but money is not everything. There is no necessity that I can see, one way or another—but my mother wishes it—that is to say, my mother thinks my father would like it——'

Roger looked quickly at Mrs. Meredith. Is there a father? he said to himself, with a mental whistle of astonishment, to which he dared not give audible utterance. 'Whew!' and the astute young man immediately leaped to the conviction that here was something unquestionably wrong.

'I thought—it was Oswald—whom Mr. Meredith wanted——'

Oswald laughed. 'Have you not found out, Cara, that Oswald is an individual?' he said. 'If Ned likes to be knocked about the world according to other people's fancies, that is his affair. I don't. Yes, it was Oswald that was wanted; but I never was a man for competitive examinations, my ideas don't run in that channel, so I dropped my mantle upon my brother. Oh, he will have compensation; he will be a Member of Council while I am only a briefless barrister.

He will move princes about like chessmen while I have no influence with anyone but a stray editor. Ned will be the great man of the family —what, you don't approve of me! You would rather Ned stayed at home than I?'

Cara had given him a very young girl's most emphatic sign of disapproval. She turned her shoulder upon him, and averted her head. Poor Roger looked on with a burning heart, seeing the two brothers, one on each side of her, contending, as it seemed, for her approbation. The fact that there were two seemed to shut him out more and more. He was indignant, disappointed, wounded. He said to himself in his heart every ill thing he could think of against this strange house. First, the Sunday dinner-party—even though he had himself condoned it by becoming one of the guests; second, the work left on the table, which he felt sure the mistress of the house was quite capable of taking up, although restrained by his presence from actually doing so. Then the separation of the family—the father in India, the mother here. What a house for Cara to be thrown into! What an example for her! A woman who lived apart from her husband

and yet asked people to dinner could not be a proper woman to have the charge of Cara. Of course, she was just the sort of person to encourage a girl in flirting, to put evil into her head. These were the thoughts that kept burning and scorching the brain of poor Roger as he stood before the fire in this strange house, the people on either side of him so much engaged with each other, and he so completely left out. Why did he come here to make himself unhappy? Why build such foolish hopes upon this day? His aunt at Notting Hill would have been a much better companion, a great deal kinder, and she would be wondering now what had become of him, or thinking, perhaps, that he was enjoying himself! Strange enjoyment! He made a distinct pause in his thoughts to realise her, but he made no sort of movement to go away, which was the only thing he could do to relieve her anxiety. She would wonder if he meant to come back; if he was going to stay all night; or if he had gone off straight from his friend's house to catch the train. There were not all the usual trains on Sunday nights, and this would perplex her, poor lady, still more. All this passed through

his mind, and he was very uncomfortable. Yet he made no attempt to go away.

'Roger,' said Cara, getting up suddenly, for she felt herself embarrassed on her side, and was glad of a way of escape, 'are you going back to the College to-night?'

Her question chimed in with his thoughts, but he did not reply in the way that would have seemed most in keeping with those thoughts. 'It does not matter,' he said; 'I think I shall go down by the first train to-morrow.' As soon as he felt her soft eyes upon him the foolish young fellow thought that all must go well.

'If I were you I would go to-night,' she said; 'you will be obliged to get up so early, and it is so dark in the mornings. You never used to like getting up——.' Roger felt the light and the warmth coming back to him, flooding him round and round.

'I don't mind now,' he said. 'It does not matter. To-night is better than to-morrow,' which was an incoherent utterance that Cara could not understand.

'Have you been enjoying it, then? I was afraid you did not like them,' said Cara, very

low, so that no one could hear but himself. Then Roger glowed with sudden kindness, and felt ready to embrace the whole party.

'It is only my bad manners,' he said. 'Oh, Cara, have I been making myself disagreeable? You know they always go on at me about my manners at home.'

'Your manners are well enough,' she said, with a serious look. 'I thought you were not —pleased. Come, then, and sit down, and talk with the rest; they are more like you than they are like me. You ought to be friends, for you are all—boys. A girl has less to say to them. And then Edward is going to India, too——'

'I would rather talk to you; but I will do whatever you like, Cara.'

'Yes; but do it, then,' she said with a smile, and, leaving him there she went over to the other side of the fire, and sat down under the shadow of Mrs. Meredith, from whence she looked across placidly at the three whom she had abandoned. Mrs. Meredith smiled upon Cara, putting out her hand caressingly to lay it upon the girl's shoulder. They made a pretty group; but Mr. Beresford, who was leaning

over the little table, talking earnestly, did not care for the interruption. A slight cloud came over his face when his daughter came within hearing. He finished what he was saying quickly, and then was silent; it had not been intended for her ear. While on the other side of the room the young men looked at each other in a kind of armed truce, and a moment of dead silence elapsed, the first that had occurred since they came into the room, in the midst of which Mrs. Meredith was heard saying, 'I fear you are not amusing yourself, Cara. Are the boys disagreeable? Go and sing something for us. I like your soft little voice on Sunday night. Sing me the "Angels;" that suits you best.'

'Just what I was going to suggest,' said Oswald, getting up and going to the piano to open it for her. It was in the back part of the room, which was but partially lighted. Both the others, in their different ways, bestowed a private benediction on Oswald, who was more ready than either of them. They sat looking wistfully into the dimness, listening to Cara's soft voice, which rose out of it like a bird. 'Angels, ever bright and fair,' she sang, looking herself, that little white vision, only half-

visible, like anything angelic or fairy-like, which the imagination chose to select. Roger listened with his heart full. But for the apparition of that other figure beside her, behind her, who stood keeping time with an involuntary movement of his head and hand in a way which tempted even his brother to blaspheme, Roger's heart would have run over with a soft ecstasy. He had never heard Cara sing before, except in her schoolgirl days. As for the other two, the elder pair, Mr. Beresford's countenance cleared and he resumed his talk, and Mrs. Meredith once more gave him her whole attention, while Edward and Roger stared into the back drawing-room. They did not address nor take any notice of each other, but gazed blankly at Cara, who, having already one attendant, evidently wanted none of them. When she had come to an end of that song, Mrs. Meredith, though she was to all appearance absorbed in what Mr. Beresford was saying, cast a word over her shoulder to the young performer.

'That was very sweet; thank you, dear. Now sing us something else.' And Cara went on.

Roger sat and listened, between misery and

rapture. He did not know which predominated. Edward, to whose state of mind no one had any clue, turned over a book, and hummed the air she was singing. Not a word passed between the young men, notwithstanding that they were both boys, as Cara had said, both going to India, and with every kind of bond of external resemblance. But Roger did not feel any direct hatred to Edward as he did to the other, who was always thrusting himself forward; and thus an hour passed away. When that was over, Cara rose and said good-night. Then there was a question who was to take her home, which showed as much as did his own attitude—reclining tranquilly in his chair—that Mr. Beresford had no idea of going away. Here Roger sprang to the front, for once forestalling Oswald. He took his leave hurriedly, with confused thanks to Mrs. Meredith, and followed Cara closely as she went downstairs, alarmed less someone might interfere even at the last moment. It was but a few steps, unfortunately, from one door to the other, and though she lingered a moment on the step, wrapping her shawl closely around her, Cara did not ask him to go in.

'It was very kind of you to come,' she said,

giving him her hand; 'and I am afraid you have not enjoyed it, Roger; but you will like them better when you see more of them.' She said this as people say so many things, apologetic and otherwise, not because she wanted to apologise for the Merédiths, but because she did not know very well what to say.

'I don't think I shall ever like them,' said Roger; 'but that does not matter. Cara, let me just say one word. I don't think that they are the right kind of people—for you.'

'For me!' After the first astonishment Cara laughed. 'I did not think you set up for being such a critic. What have they done to make you think ill of them? They have been very kind to you.'

'I did not want their kindness,' said Roger, hotly; 'they are not the kind of people I like to see you with, Cara.'

'I think I will say good-night,' said Cara, with dignity. 'It is cold here, and you have a long walk to Notting Hill. It is a pity you missed your train. Good-night.'

She did not so much as look at him, as she turned away and disappeared, the door closing behind her. He had offended her now to make an appropriate finish of this unhappy Sunday!

But however cold it might have been to Cara, it was not cold to Roger as he pushed his way at a tremendous pace along the Sunday streets, so much darker than usual on account of the closed shops, and filled with passengers so different from the usual crowd. He would have kept himself warm in Siberia at that pace. His aunt was waiting for him, but half-disposed to give up her watch, and wondering what had become of him, as he thought she would.

'I am very glad to have you for another night, Roger; but I thought you must have rushed off to catch the train without thinking of your portmanteau,' she said; and then she gave him a glass of wine, half-proud, half-disappointed to hear that he had dined 'with his fine friends,' and sent him to bed with kind good-nights; for he had to start early in the morning, and, no doubt, she thought, the day had been fatiguing, though so pleasant. She was kinder than Cara; perhaps it would have been better for him if he had not gone to the Square at all, but contented himself with Notting Hill.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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